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[SUSPICIONS.]

CECIL'S FORTUNE.

CHAPTER XI.

LOVE ON THE WRONG SIDE.

Hell has no hatred like a woman scorned.

BYRON.

"A LETTER for Mr. Renfrew," said the servant who appeared when the door was opened.

The elder Mr. Renfrew, who was lounging by the fire pulling the ends of his long fair moustache, started up and stretched out his hand.

"It's for you, sir. There's the name Cecil on it," said the maid, and she handed the letter to Cecil.

Miss Juliana Lawson wondered who it was from, and what news it contained, and her small dull black eyes were fixed eagerly on Cecil while he was breaking the seal and reading the letter. She saw his face grow hot and flush crimson to the roots of his dark hair, and then a pallor succeeded—a whiteness that contrasted with that warm bronze of his usual colouring, which she, and as we know, the Lady Kate Ormond so much admired. And there came a wild, hopeless, yearning look into Cecil's eyes. He, poor fellow, had not any idea that the changes of his face were being so earnestly studied by anybody in the room.

He never gave Miss Juliana a stray thought, and was quite unconscious that she ever wasted one on him. He crushed the letter in his hand

and strode towards the door where the servant maid was still standing.

"I will write an answer," he said. "Is anybody waiting?"

"Yes, sir; a footman, or at least a groom. I think there's a boy holding his horse in the street."

The elder Mr. Renfrew walked towards the door. As he passed Miss Juliana, he gave her a sweet and languishing smile, but the young lady who had not moved in the upper circles, or learned repose of manner, curled her lip and raised her eyebrows in an insulting expression of scorn.

"I don't want any of your loving looks," she muttered, almost audibly between her teeth, for the obstinate indifference of the man who had struck her fancy cut her to the soul, and put her out of conceit with the whole world.

Meanwhile Mr. Renfrew, senior, followed his son upstairs to the top of the house, where that young gentleman occupied a fairly sized room looking on the street.

"Well, what is it? Who on earth is your correspondent? Who keeps a groom and sends word to wait for your answer? Anybody who will become a shareholder in the company that is to make your fortune? Don't be mysterious. Tell me all about it."

"There is not much to tell. I am offered the post of private secretary to a nobleman—to reside in the house at a salary of two hundred a year if I can give a couple of references, that is all."

Mr. Renfrew, senior, uttered a shrill, prolonged whistle, sank into a chair, and held up his hands in amaze.

"Belgrave!" he said. "Why a good-looking

fellow like you are ought to make your fortune there. Why there's a lovely girl about to be sacrificed to a man double her age. I know all about the peerage and the state of the families of these people among whom you and I ought to move as equals. Now strike in, make love to the girl; it won't do to run off with her and marry her, because there's an infernally hard woman in the case, the countess, and they can keep every farthing from the poor little girl if she makes a silly, runaway love-match; and unless you can marry a big fortune you would never be so silly as to marry at all. But make love to her, win her heart, if she has one, so few of these aristocratic women have, but nevertheless they have passions, vanity, love of conquest, desire for adventure, a craving for intrigue, and a hankering after what is risky. Play upon all these elements with which the soul of the little fair-haired marchioness is sure to be filled. Make yourself her cavalier, constitute yourself her male confidant. She will be rich, very rich, and powerful. All pretty women who have money are powerful, unless they are great idiots; and you will win a fortune at this rate, Cecil. The young lady will give you thousands as carelessly as a school-boy's mother gives him sugarplums—as carelessly and as lavishly. She will get you a lucrative place under Government, when once the present Parliament goes out of office, which it is certain to do soon, and then you can watch your opportunity and marry an heiress at your leisure."

"Father," said Cecil, turning round and facing his parent, "you and I speak different languages, think different thoughts, cannot understand each other, therefore it is little use

to give me all this worldly advice. I would not do so mean a thing as to build my fortune on the weakness and foibles of a girl. I would not be such a coward. As for Lady Kate Ormond, I have had the happiness of speaking to her. I believe her devoid of vanity and love of intrigue. I believe her to be pure-minded, generous, and good, and I should not like to bring an element of discord into her life if she really married this marquis."

"My good son," returned Mr. Renfrew, "you are the true child of your mother, who was a paragon of all the virtues; indeed, she was too good for me, so that we could never get on well together or reciprocate one another's sentiments."

"Do not speak of her," the young man cried, passionately. "She is dead, and I loved her with my whole heart. From her I inherit what little good there is in me. She taught me to do my duty and hate a lie. Now with regard to this position, it is a good one, and I shall accept it, and as noblemen mostly in these cases pay their secretaries in advance, I shall have some money next week, with which I shall pay what you owe here, and I shall advance you ten pounds."

"You are very good," said his father, sarcastically; "but I hope to be beyond the need of charitable benefits before long. The company promises well, the offices will open in Queen Victoria Street next week, and I have no doubt of being able to sell a large number of shares."

"I have decided to have nothing whatever to do with that company," said Cecil. "I have looked into the prospectuses and I see nothing in them that I can confide in; indeed, I have come to the conclusion that the whole affair is a sham."

The elder Renfrew's eyes flashed, and he struck the painted chest of drawers angrily with his open palm.

"You are indeed the son of your mother," he said, viciously. "I might have made my fortune a dozen times if she would have helped me, but she never would; and now you going into the house of this old fellow might induce him to buy shares in a splendid concern that is sure to make the fortunes of all that engage in it."

"I will have nothing to do with it," Cecil repeated, steadily, "because I believe it to be emphatically a swindle."

The elder Renfrew broke into a satirical laugh.

"My dear, honourable son," he said, "the whole of society is one great sham—one monstrous swindle, only some of them are not successful ones because they are found out too soon; in those cases the unfortunate members of the so-called swindle come off badly; but if they are wise this never happens to them. For my part I have never got into any scrape that I have not been able to creep out of somehow, though I am not so successful as the great big shams of the world. The Government, the Lords and Commons, the Church, the law courts, the jargon of art and literature, the magazines, the public journals, the whole of fashionable society, are one series of gigantic shams, at which the wise laugh, while idiots believe in them and are taken in. Now I don't profess to you that the Electric Light Agricultural Society, Limited, is instituted on purely philanthropic principles, having for its end and aim the benefit and well-being of humanity. Nothing of the kind; I wish to make my fortune and I don't wish to be considered a rascal, and if I do any mischief I intend to put all the blame, all the responsibility on other people's shoulders; and in thus describing my aims and desires I am exactly describing those of every Prime Minister who undertakes the reins of office in that huge swindle, the Government of this enlightened, humbugging, hypocritical country. Ha, ha, ha! And now tell me when do you go to this great lord's house, and when am I to receive my ten pounds, for, egad, I want it badly."

"I shall leave to-morrow afternoon," replied Cecil, gloomily, "that is if the earl is satisfied with the reference I have to give him, that of the heads of the German college where I was

educated—they have some days since sent me a letter of recommendation."

Mr. Renfrew did not trouble himself to inquire in what way his son had managed to introduce himself to the notice of the Earl of Belgrave. He never believed much of anyone, and he supposed in his heart that Cecil had been clever enough to finesse for himself. As he went down the stairs to the drawing-room whistling a gay tune he said to his own heart:

"The boy is no idiot, he chooses to assume the virtuoso, but in reality he has set his mind on making his fortune, and it strikes me very forcibly that he will make it, too; but he shall not lord it over me. No, my fine son, I mean to be independent of you. Ah, how tired one gets of eating beef and mutton and apple pie day after day in a third-rate boarding-house like this. But courage, Juliana is ugly, but she is young, her parents are simpletons, they have fifteen thousand pounds and Cecil is going away."

Yes, Mr. Renfrew senior had made up his mind to end his life of wanderings, debts, billiards, dice, and dissipation by marrying the fair Juliana Lawson; but all the while Juliana, whose proud boast it had been that she "had not an atom of love in her," was desperately in-fatuated with Cecil Renfrew.

Cecil remained in his room to write an answer to the earl, whose messenger was waiting, and to enclose his letter of recommendation from the heads of his German college; then he descended to the drawing-room where all the boarders were seated round the large table engaged in a game of "nap"—that game for which a certain section of the British public seems to have a craze at present. Juliana's small, dull, black eyes shone brightly when Cecil approached the table.

"Won't you play?" she said, sweetly. "We are too many already," said one of the bank clerks, gruffly.

He never lost sight of the fact, this same bank clerk, that Juliana was the heiress of fifteen thousand pounds, and he was mortally jealous of Cecil Renfrew.

"Yes, nap ought never to be played by more than five people," said Cecil; "but we can make up another party at the smaller table."

And he looked at the two Frenchmen, whose shallow, thin faces were sarcastic mocking smiles. The vagaries of "the ugly little rich girl," as they called Miss Lawson to each other, and the jealousies of the bank clerks, were a source of great amusement to these cynical men.

"I would rather play at the smaller table," said "the ugly little rich girl." "There, I have made my three tricks. Everyone pay me threepence, please."

As soon as she had swept her winnings into her purse, Juliana arose and organised another game for herself and the two Renfrews at the other table. The bank clerks and the Frenchmen were left to get on as well together as they could.

Mr. Renfrew senior always contrived to win at nap, not largely, but evenly. Fortune favoured him in a singular manner, and besides, he played with a finished skill. As for Juliana, the moment she began to play at the same table with Cecil she began to lose. She lost her head, as the saying is, and when wine and spirits, which the boarders all provided for themselves, were brought in at half-past eleven, Mr. Renfrew rose the winner of seven-and-sixpence, five shillings of which Juliana had lost. Juliana was on thorns to know what message Cecil had received.

The elder Renfrew read her like a book, read everything that was rushing through her perplexed and narrow mind, and he chuckled to himself, for he knew what he intended to do. Cecil, unconscious of the admiration of Juliana, was putting the cards away neatly into their box, his thoughts a hundred miles away from the Keppel Street drawing-room.

"Well, Cecil," said Mr. Renfrew, suddenly, "I suppose we shan't see much of you after to-morrow, my boy."

"Not much, I think," Cecil answered, absently.

Poor Juliana's heart gave a great thump, and then sank like lead in her breast.

"Is—Mr. Cecil going away?" she asked, in a low stifled voice.

"Yes, indeed; he is appointed secretary to the Earl of Belgrave, and this will be a busy session, and Cecil is healthful, young and energetic. I should not wonder if he does not make his fortune in the earl's house, marry his daughter, Lady Kate, or something, and she is the prettiest girl in England or out of it."

Juliana turned and watched Cecil. He had vast command of countenance, but she saw his dark face flame crimson, and she said to her heart:

"That Lady Kate, if I could kill her!"

For though Juliana had hitherto fancied that she had not an atom of love in her, she was in reality capable of one of those deep and desperate passions which have now and anon led men and women to acts of heroism or crimes of violence, according as their nature dictated or their circumstances fell out.

Miss Lawson, whom the Frenchmen called "the ugly little rich girl," was an insignificant-looking little person, short, thick, with a rather stupid fat face, small black eyes, and round thick lips. Nobody ever could have supposed her capable of a "grande passion," as the French call it, but nevertheless Miss Juliana was "fit for anything," as she would herself have expressed it, and the mention of a possible rival drove her mad.

"So you are going to marry the daughter of the Earl of Belgrave, are you?"

Juliana had never learned to command her emotions. Anybody who took the trouble to notice her must have seen that she asked this question in the greatest rage, but fortunately or unfortunately for Cecil he never took more notice of Miss Lawson than the strictest politeness required. Thus he actually fancied that the young lady had been misinformed, and he hastened to explain.

"Miss Lawson, you might almost as reasonably ask some footman in the royal household if he were going to marry the Princess Beatrice. I should be shewn the door if such a notion got abroad."

Juliana gave a sigh of relief, and her hatred of Lady Kate Ormond slumbered for a while.

"Lady Kate," pursued Cecil, "is to marry the Marquis of St. Germaine."

"The richest man in France—the handsomest, the wickedest!" broke in the two Frenchmen, who hated the aristocracy of their country.

"Serves her right!" muttered Juliana between her teeth. "So you will never come here to see us any more?" said Juliana, tenderly, to Cecil, who now came and sat by her side, for her mention of Lady Kate gave her an interest in his eyes.

"Yes, I shall come to see my father, but you will be gone, Miss Lawson."

"Yes," replied Juliana; "but in the summer you might come and visit us at our house in Kent; it's called The Oaklands; it's a pretty place. Will you come?"

And she sighed. Cecil murmured his thanks and something about "being very happy if he had time in the summer," which made poor Juliana very happy also for the time, for when people love, not wisely, but too well, they catch at straws and allow themselves to embark in shallow boats on the sea of hope—barques which in general upset and plunge them into the ocean of despair.

The wine and water and biscuits were discussed, and then the ladies retired. Juliana, in the solitude of her own room, sat down and penned a letter to Cecil—a strange, wild, impassioned letter. It ran thus:

"DEAR MR. RENFREW, "Keppel Street.

"I have only known you a week, and yet I find myself writing to you—I that have hitherto hated mankind, and declared that I would either marry a monstrously rich man whom I should not care for, or die an old maid. For all I thought of was increased wealth and a higher social position than I enjoy at pre-

sent; in fact, I thought myself cold and heartless, Mr. Renfrew, as a statue of marble. And now all is changed. I am ready to endure anything, give everything; I am willing almost to die for the sake of the man who has won my heart with a few words, a few lightning glances of his eyes. Mr. Renfrew, you are poor, and I am rich; you are about to accept the onerous duties of private secretary to a proud, tyrannical nobleman—proud and tyrannical as all these aristocrats are. I offer you my fortune in the future, and at present such a handsome income as I am sure my good father will allow us. You are so talented that I should like you to go to study first for the bar, and then to go into Parliament. I am sure England will ring proudly with your name before many years are past. And now in conclusion let me beg you to write an answer to this letter and give it to the housemaid, Harriet. I shall trust her with this one, and tell her that she is to look for an answer from you. I can say no more; my heart is far too full. Only believe in the deep and fervent love of your devoted Juliana, she who hopes one day to become your happy, happy wife."

This extraordinary epistle Miss Lawson folded, placed in a delicate pink scented envelope, and addressed to Cecil Renfrew, Esq. Then she stole softly out on the landing, looked over the balusters, and waited patiently until the maid Harriet came upstairs to bed. Then Juliana put the delicate-looking note into her hands.

"Give that to Mr. Renfrew in the morning, please," she said, "before breakfast, and there is a little present for yourself."

The present consisted of a couple of half-crowns.

"Thanks, miss," cried Harriet, gratefully.

"And, Harriette, not one word of this to a living soul. If you know how to hold your tongue you will always find me your friend."

"I will hold my tongue, miss. I would have it cut out before it should utter a word," said Harriet, fervently, for Harriet loved half-crowns both in possession and in perspective.

Away she went to the upper regions, and Miss Lawson retired to her room, but she hardly slept all night. She was, poor girl, naturally ashamed and afraid of what she had done. More than once during the night she was on the point of stealing on tip-toe to the sleeping-room of Harriette, and asking her to return her the letter and say nothing about it, but then she thought on Cecil's dreamy dark eyes, his manly and aristocratic bearing, his high lineage, his talents, and she said to herself:

"No, no, I love him. I am too rich for him to aspire to me. I must tell him the truth—that I love him more than my life."

And thinking thus poor Juliana sank off to sleep towards morning, and she slept until the first bell warned her that in twenty minutes breakfast would be ready. She sprang up and bathed her face, and combed out and twisted up her hair, then hurried on her things, wearing the most becoming gown she owned, with collar and cuffs of Irish point.

A hasty toilette, but Juliana thought herself charming—this is sometimes the case with heiresses; that is, they have listened to so much flattery all their lives that they believe it all in the end; and Juliana Lawson, in truth, thought herself a very graceful, captivating young woman.

She hastened into the dining-room when breakfast was laid for the boarders; the bank clerks—who occupied a room together at the back of the dining-room, and who were compelled to be very punctual in their attendance in the City—were already devouring ham and eggs, with a great appetite, though they both sprang up to place a chair for the heiress when she entered, she thanked them and smiled a cold smile; and then the other boarders came in in a crowd.

Mrs. Watts began to dispense the tea and coffee, and Mr. Renfrew expressed his intention of visiting the opera that night and listening to the enchanting Patti; the fact was he had that morning received a ticket for a box from one of

the expectant shareholders in the Electric Light Agricultural Company, but Cecil Renfrew did not appear. Juliana's heart sank as the meal proceeded and the hero of her dreams did not join the cheerful breakfast party.

"Where is Mr. Renfrew junior," she managed to say, at length, gaily, to the elder Renfrew.

"He had a letter, he told me, which obliged him to breakfast in the City," replied the father of Cecil.

And Juliana's heart sank; she felt as if the eyes of all the boarders were fixed upon her. She tried to laugh, then said the light of the April morning was too strong for her eyes, and she left the room and sought her own, where she walked up and down like a caged tigress.

"If he refuses me, if he laughs at me. Oh! I will have his life!" she said, and she gnashed her teeth in her deadly spite and rage. "If I spend every farthing of the fortune that is coming to me in devising his ruin, I will spend it and think it well spent if I can but humble him to the dust. If he does not become my husband," and she laughed a satanic laugh, "then I will not rest until he becomes a convict, heavily ironed, condemned for the whole term of his natural existence to penal servitude. Yes, I will set my wits to work to bring that about, and I will not rest," she added, raising her voice to a shrill scream, "until it has come to pass."

At that moment came a light, distinct rap at the door.

"Come in," said Juliana; she turned the key and there entered Harriet, the maid; she held a letter between her fingers which she laid down on the dressing-table, close to where Juliana stood. Miss Lawson smiled faintly. "Is that from Mr. Cecil Renfrew?"

"Yes, miss."

And the maid went out, closing the door after her. Then Juliana tore open the letter and read as follows:

"DEAR MADAM,—A thousand thanks for the generous and undeserved interest you take in me. I am but a poor fellow with all the difficulties of life before me; these I am determined either to conquer for myself, or, if I fail, then mine be the shame and humiliation of defeat. No other friend, however noble and kind, shall share them. I shall not appear in Keppel Street again because I feel that you would rather not meet again a fellow so unfortunately placed as myself, and, at the same time, so utterly unable now or at any future time to accept any favour from your kindly hands. May you meet with a man as devoted and noble as you deserve, whose happiness will be bound up in your own.—Your obedient servant, CECIL RENFREW."

"What does he mean? Is it a distinct refusal, or is it only his pride because he is poor and I am rich? I will read this curious letter again."

And Juliana did read it again, but she read it with the wish to find love hidden in those phrases which Cecil, in his chivalrous desire to render his refusal meek and humble to the woman whom he was compelled to wound, had made too gentle, and in his gentleness she fancied she had discovered a hidden love, or, at least, something very like love.

"He shall love me, he shall marry me," she said, at length, crushing the letter in her hand. "If he does not I will bring him to destruction, and to death. I know what I will do!"

CHAPTER XII.

A STRANGE PLOT.

But even in sleeping the memory of words
Once spoken by thee came sweet on mine ear,
And the music around me no more could I hear.

CECIL had packed up his small belongings in his trunk and travelling case, when he had read the letter of the infatuated Juliana Lawson, and he had written two letters, one to the young lady in question, the other to the landlady enclosing the sum he owed for his board. Then he had sent for a cab, and had

been driven to a quiet hotel nearer to Grosvenor Square. Here he had written letters and prepared himself generally for his new position of secretary to the Earl of Belgrave. And at half-past four he drove to the great town mansion of the elderly nobleman in a hansom.

"I shall not see her, of course," the young man said to himself.

And he was right. He did not catch even a glimpse of Lady Kate Ormond for the space of several days. The household of the Countess of Belgrave was conducted on the most orthodox and conventional principles that it is possible to imagine, and she would not have admitted the obscure young secretary to intimacy for the price of a province.

Cecil had a well appointed sleeping chamber and bath room at the end of a corridor on the second floor; then he had a private sitting-room leading off from the inner entrance hall. Here he breakfasted and dined alone. His dinner hour was four.

One of the servants gave him a card every day with the menu of the dainties provided for the household, and he was asked to mark what he required to be served at his own table at four o'clock. At eleven he attended the earl in his library, and he remained with him writing his letters and reading his official correspondence till two.

From that hour till ten, when the earl went to the House, and his secretary accompanied him, Cecil's time was his own, but all the rooms in the house were closed against him save the library and his own two apartments. He never even heard the voice of the Lady Kate on the stairs; he never caught a glimpse of her through the window, for both his own rooms and the library where he worked with the earl looked only upon a large enclosed court with a grass plat in the centre.

This place was flowerless, charmless, deserted. The Lady Kate never passed that way, and all the while Cecil had not truly learnt either patience or abnegation. He could not say "It is better thus—better that I should never meet her; she can never be anything to me." On the contrary; he said to himself:

"I must see her again. My whole soul is consumed by my great burning love for her. I will not even believe that she is nothing to me—not even that I am nothing to her. Such a desperate love as mine is bound to meet with some response. I remember how she kissed my hand; that kiss burns me yet. Night and day Fate has placed me under the same roof with her, though I never see her, never hear her name mentioned. Yes, we must meet if only to say a long good-bye; if only that I am to hear her tell me that this marriage is inevitable, which I suppose it is."

And never once on the gilded staircase or in the lighted corridors did the poor talented, handsome secretary meet with the queen of his soul. One night he attended the old earl to the House of Lords. The debate was fiery: it touched some of the burning questions of the day; the extension of franchise; the right of voting, which if carried out to its utmost limits, so the Conservative members said, would place shabby, half-educated clerks and dirty artisans first in the House of Commons, next in the Cabinet, and would bring about in this well ordered England of ours first a revolution, next a republic, which would enact as murderous laws against the aristocrats as ever Robespierre and Marat forged during the days of the terror in old France.

The old earl, patrician to the backbone, proud, courtly, handsome, with his pink and white tinting, his aquiline nose and clear blue eyes, and snowy hair and moustache; the old earl, erect, slender, haughty, stood up and spoke, and his secretary made notes, and all the while his hot rebellious heart was more in unison with the people than with the lofty patrician's whose bread he ate, whose daughter he loved, whose pride he hated in his heart of hearts; but nobody took much notice of the slim, dark, handsome young man who wrote so rapidly, who looked about so little, whose courtly bow and pleasant voice answered every appeal that hap-

pened casually to be made to him throughout the evening. He drove home with the earl in his private carriage.

"Rascals!" said the old nobleman, "if they get into power they will end by burning London to the ground!"

One or two noble lords had said something very like this in the House. Cecil would rather have been silent, but feeling bound to say something, he remarked:

"It will be a long time, my lord, before that comes to pass," and his tone was soothing, and his air deferential, and these satisfied the old earl.

Arrived at Grosvenor Square the earl hurried to his drawing-room. There were lights there, and a gay company were assembled at a brilliant conversation to be followed by a performance of some Italian opera singing and a sumptuous supper.

It was half-past two, and the company had risen from supper, and the sound of music and laughter floated down the wide staircase to the ears of Cecil as he crossed the hall towards his own sitting-room. He knew perfectly well that he had no right to expect to take part in these revelries, that his poverty, his circumstances, the conditions of his life, shut him out as completely from that assemblage in the gay drawing-rooms as our first parents were shut out of the Eden which they had forfeited, and yet his heart was sore and savage, and he hated himself for what he called his want of manly fibre.

He entered his room; the gas was alight. A dainty little cold supper was laid for him—cold roast fowl and tongue, and a salad, and some fine fancy rolls and fruit and some choice wine. He was hungry and thirsty, so he sat down and began to eat without ceremony. He ate heartily, and drank some burgundy, and then he prepared to light a cigar, when there came a sudden light rap on the door.

His heart beat tumultuously. The sounds of a thousand bells were in his ears. He fancied that when he said come in the Lady Kate would enter—and he was disappointed. In lieu of the lovely fair-haired, grey-eyed Kate there entered a slim, dark, genteel young woman in a black silk gown, which fitted her admirably, and she wore a pink cap on her head.

She curtsied quite gracefully to the young secretary. Cecil wondered if she were what the world calls a lady, and decided that if not she still came very near to that enchanted title.

"I beg your pardon, I believe that I have the honour of addressing Mr. Cecil Renfrew," said Miss Pomfret.

"That is my name, madam; and you?"

"Oh, I am a very humble person," the maid rejoined, with a short laugh. "I am only Cecilia Pomfret, Lady Kate's maid."

Cecil was silent. He remembered that this woman had abandoned sweet Kate in the cold rainy streets, and he felt inclined to tell her to leave his room. However, he pointed to a chair civilly enough, and he said:

"Do you seek my advice in any matter?"

"No, not at all," said Pomfret, coolly. "I do not ask advice of anyone. I bring you a message from Lady Kate herself."

Cecil's heart bounded; his blood raced madly in his veins, but he preserved a most wonderful composure of manner.

"What is the Lady Kate's pleasure?" he asked.

Miss Pomfret broke into a low and mocking laugh.

"I am not blind," said she, "and I am not deaf, and I know that you are in love with Lady Kate, and that she is in love with you, but since she would only bring you herself and not a farthing of fortune, for of course the earl and the countess would take it all from her if she married you, I suppose you are too wise a young man to wish to make her your wife. She could not make your puddings, or boil your potatoes, or mend your stockings. She would spend all her time regretting the splendours and the luxuries she had quitted, and that would not make married life cheerful or profitable."

Miss Pomfret paused. Cecil felt possessed by a strange wrath and distrust of this young person, yet his heart was beating with pleasure since he had heard that news that Lady Kate loved him.

"Well," he said, slowly, "you seem to know a great deal about me and my thoughts and opinions. Miss Pomfret, did I understand that Lady Kate Ormond had honoured me with a message?"

"Oh, yes, if it is an honour she has indeed honoured you, sir. She has been presented at the Drawing-room of the Princess of Wales to-day by the countess, her mother, and all the rooms were in a buzz about her beauty. To-night the countess has given a conversation and supper; to-morrow there will be a grand masked ball at the Duchess of Berrylands in Park Lane, and Lady Kate will be there in the character of Jael. You would never think it, the cruel Jewish woman who slew Sisera, you know, so treacherously; you have read of her in Jewish history."

Miss Pomfret paused.

"What made her choose so hateful a character?" cried Cecil.

Miss Pomfret laughed and clapped her hands.

"I knew you would not like it," she said. "I only said that to frighten you. No, but Lady Kate has made up her mind that she will not be a Mary Queen of Scots, nor a Marie Antoinette. No, nor a fairy, nor a flower-girl, nor a shepherdess, nor even a gipsy or a nun, nor an Anna Boleen. All those characters have been taken so often, and she would be sure to meet with duplicates of herself. No, she has chosen the character of a daughter of the people, Charlotte Corday, who gave her life that she might rid France of a tyrant. She has been chanting those noble lines:

The people Lord, the people;
Not thrones and crowns, but men,

the whole of yesterday. She is about to marry a rich French noble, but she is nevertheless a true Republican at heart, and the reason is only this—she loves you!"

Miss Pomfret folded her hands before her and smiled demurely at Cecil. He rose to his feet and began to pace the room with long fierce strides. He could not trust himself to speak. At last he stopped before Miss Pomfret; his dark eyes flashed:

"Did Lady Kate tell you to tell me all this?"

"Certainly not. She thinks I do not guess her secret; do not read it in her, hear it in the tones of her voice when she speaks of you and of my lord marquis. I know well how she hates the one and loves the other. Well, she told me to come to you and to say that in reality she will be at this ball to-morrow night dressed as Charlotte Corday, but the countess will suppose her to represent the character of Lady Jane Gray. You see she wishes to go in the court dress of the time just before the outbreak of the French Revolution—knee breeches of purple silk, white hose, shoes with diamond buckles, and long waistcoat of cloth and gold and crimson velvet coat, sword, and white wig. It is a splendid dress, and it is already prepared for you in the house. It is made for a man of rather larger build than yourself, though you are tall as an Adonis, still the size will obviate any difficulties. Also I will give you a card on which is the name of a gentleman, Sir Ralph Sullivan, who has really had an invite to the ball, but who was taken ill on his way home from Ireland, and who wrote to the countess, who is his first cousin, to excuse him to the duchess, but I had the letter and opened it quite through a mistake. When I saw what I had done I mentioned it to Lady Kate, and she at once exclaimed, 'Oh, let the handsome secretary dress in Sir Ralph's clothes and go to the ball. Let us burn the letter and say nothing to the countess. Then let me go as Charlotte Corday, and another person take my character of Lady Jane Gray. We must never remove our masks; it will never be found out, and then I can speak once more to Cecil Renfrew, and tell him what is on my mind, for I

wish to befriend him,' says she. Ha, ha, ha! My dear Mr. Renfrew, Lady Kate is a little madcap, but she is over head and ears in love with you. Will you enter into this?"

"I hate deception," said Cecil, aloud; but he added to his own soul: "I love lovely Kate Ormond. All is fair in love, but it seems more like an episode in an old Italian play than one in this practical London of the nineteenth century. I will do it," he said, slowly. "But, Miss Pomfret, if you, as I surmise, are to take the part of your young lady, and if you betray her?"

"I should simply ruin myself," interrupted Miss Pomfret. "No, no, it is only a bit of fun. Lady Kate can't live without wild excitement of some sort. You must mind your p's and q's, though, because during the whole time you will be in a crowd composed of nearly all the celebrities of Europe, and every eye will be fixed upon you."

"And you also," cried Cecil, "if you have to act the part of Lady Kate. What about the French marquis?"

"I speak French perfectly," said Pomfret, quietly; "it is my mother tongue."

"Hush!" cried Cecil, "I hear the sound of footsteps and rustling garments in the hall. Who is this lady?"

(To be Continued.)

PUBLIC AMUSEMENTS.

THE DRAMA.

At the Royal Court Theatre Mdme. Modjeska has taken the town by storm by her acting in Mr. Mortimer's English version of "La Dame aux Camelias," entitled "Heartsease," specially written for Madame Modjeska. A more perfect piece of acting was never witnessed on the English boards. This lady is well supported by Mesdames Emery, Varre, Giffard, and R. G. de Thiere, and Messrs. Arthur Dacre, Price, Holman, Earley, Douglas, Phipps, and G. W. Anson. The performance takes place daily at two o'clock in the afternoon, and anyone wishing to enjoy a dramatic treat will visit "Heartsease" in the afternoon and "The Old Love and The New" in the evening. Two more clever, amusing, interesting pieces were never produced even in what octogenarians call the palmy state of the drama.

Mr. MAPLESON commenced his season of Italian Opera at Her Majesty's Theatre on Saturday the 15th inst. with "Faust." He promises three new operas, viz., Boito's "Mefistofele," Verdi's "La Forza del Destino," and Baron Orczy's "Il Rinnegato." Among the new singers is Mr. Maas.

Mr. HARRIS has produced at Drury Lane, on a very grand scale, a new ballet, entitled, "Les Sirenes." Nothing has been spared in any department to make it worthy of the reputation for spectacle the present able management has already acquired.

WITH the closing of the old Princess's to make way for a new one, the company goes for a time to the Standard, to continue, we hope, their successes. The present theatre, though occupying a most advantageous situation, is in many respects exceedingly inconvenient, and, with the improvements to be made in the new structure, it is to be hoped will be associated more cheerful chapters in its history.

THE Rotterdam Dramatic Company are announced to appear on Monday, June 7th., at the Imperial Theatre. The series of performances will commence with "Annie-mie, or Life in Zealand," in four acts. The programme will be changed each day.

PART of the St. Gothard tunnel has fallen in, killing three workmen.



[FRESH FROM SCHOOL.]

HER HUSBAND'S SECRET.

BY THE AUTHOR OF

"Frank Bertram's Wife," "Strong Temptation," &c., &c.

PROLOGUE.

HUGH! It is the chamber of death. We must enter lightly—with muffled footsteps and bated breath, for on the bed there lies one whose hours—nay, whose moments—are surely numbered. He is a peer of England. He stands high in the estimation of his fellow-men, wearing the "white flower of a blameless life." And yet that whole life's happiness has been marred by one great mistake, and at twenty-eight Hugh, Earl of Fairleigh, has no regrets for the world he is so soon to leave.

Seated near the bed, a look of keen sorrow on his handsome face, was the man destined to be the hero of this story. He was the same age as the sufferer, and a strong likeness existed between them. He was the earl's first cousin, namesake, and heir at law, but had he been poor and nameless he would yet never have escaped notice even in a crowd. There was an indescribable something in his bearing which marked him out from the commoner herd. His eyes were of a deep, intense blue, but a shadow hung over them; there were more lines on his open brow than are usual at eight-and-twenty, and about his mouth there was a hard, set expression.

People were wont to say he had never known a sorrow, and yet his face was that of a disappointed man. Where he loved he loved intensely, but he had opened his heart but to few. For the most part he distrusted and shunned

his fellows. Cold as an icicle, proud as an emperor, was the verdict of the world; true as steel, faithful to the end, that of his friends. Even those who feared him acknowledged his rare attractiveness. No girl he had asked to smile on him would have been asked in vain; but he remained invulnerable. There was a strange moistness about his blue eyes as he looked on the dying earl, a woman's tenderness in his voice as he asked:

"Do you feel any easier, Hugh?"

Lord Fairleigh shook his head.

"There will be no better for me here, old fellow. In a very little time you will be the Earl of Fairleigh. I am glad it is you to succeed me."

"And I wish I was a mechanic, a street labourer, anything in the world but a Vane of Fairleigh."

His cousin evidently knew the reason for the wild wish.

"Leave that trouble to time," he answered, gently. "For twenty years it need not worry you. Hugh," with a strange earnestness, an agony of entreaty sounding in his voice, "you will be good to her, for my sake?"

The other bit his lip impatiently. Whoever the "her" might be, it was evident this man had no kindly thoughts of her.

"Remember," besought the dying earl, "how I loved her—how very dear she was to me. I know you have suffered bitterly through her and hers, but when I am gone she will be alone in the world. For my sake, be good to her."

"What would you have me do?"

"Take her to Fairleigh; see that she has all the comforts her claim on us both demands. Remember, Hugh, whatever she may be, she will be Lady Fairleigh."

Hugh sighs bitterly.

"That journey to Rome cost us dear."

The young earl turns to him with a reproachful smile.

"Aye, but the burden has fallen heaviest on me. Remember that, Hugh, and be gentle with her."

"I wish you had asked me anything else in the world."

"It is the only anxiety I have. Promise me."

And in the stillness of the summer night, in the presence of the dying, Hugh Vane gives his solemn word to be "good" to the creature both men speak of only by the pronoun "her," and then, as though that pledge had been all he wanted, the earl's head sinks back on his pillow, and the Honourable Mr. Vane passes from a literary man with a slender purse into a powerful English peer.

He does not leave the room. He lingers, looking at the calm, dead face he has known his whole life through—the face that has never frowned on him, the lips that have never spoken an angry word to him. Very strong has been the bond between these two. Their affection for each other was wonderful, passing the love of women. A little anguish fills our hero's heart. Why has Hugh been taken, and the woman who brought them such anguish been left?

Suddenly a piercing shriek rings through the house, and the new earl rises abruptly. He passes out of the chamber of death, and down a long corridor, for the house is an old-fashioned, rambling place. At the end stands a thick green baize door. He pushes it open without ceremony, and enters the room beyond. Two women stand there. One is beyond middle age, a plain, sensible-looking woman: a servant, apparently, from her neat black dress and close cap. The other the one whom, with his dying breath, the late lord had commended to his cousin's care.

She is very beautiful, even Hugh admits that. Beauty such as hers has wrecked his life and another's; and yet as he enters and his eyes fall on her he feels the power of her loveliness. Above the middle height, her figure perfect in majestic grace, her frame lithe and supple, each limb a model for an artist, her hair falling below her waist in blue black waves, her eyes of a dark intense violet, appearing, when their pupils are distended with excitement, perfectly

black; features whose regularity is enhanced by a glorious warmth of colouring; and a skin as soft and satiny as a rose leaf. Such is the creature Hugh has promised to be good to.

She is dressed in a loose pink wrapper, her white hands sparkle with gems, but there are paper flowers in her hair; and if you observe closer there is a strange, far-away look in her eyes, and something discordant in her smile. She goes up to Hugh with outstretched hands.

"You are better then, Lord Fairleigh."

It is the first time he has been called by his title; but, in reality, she mistakes him for his cousin whom he much resembles. He pushes her hand away, he cannot bear her touch just yet.

"What is the matter?" he asks of the woman in the close cap.

"We are very restless and quarrelsome to-night, sir," then in a whisper, "how is his lordship?"

"It is all over," he returns, in the same tone. "You had better break it to your mistress."

The girl—indeed, she is little more—comes up to him with an indiarubber ball.

"Do have a game with me, Hugh."

You can guess the truth, reader—this creature with all her beauty is to be pitied, she is hopelessly, incurably insane. Never more will the light of reason gleam in those dark eyes; never more will intellect resume its sway in that poor, diseased brain. Only twenty-two, of perfect bodily health, Bianca Vane is hopelessly mad—she may live for years but never again will she recover her reason.

She came of a high Italian family, her guardian had been glad to marry her to a foreigner who was not likely to know the taint in her blood, or to learn that for generations there had always been one maniac in the family. She was a lovely girl of eighteen then, bright, vivacious and fascinating; one short year after marriage she became as you see her now. She had not a relation in the world, she was entirely at the mercy of the man who had married her and his cousin; both of them had loved her once passionately, now only one of them remained, and his love had turned to positive aversion; any kindness he showed to her would be for the dead man's sake and not her own. She pulled him once again by his coat sleeve.

"Talk to me, I want to be amused."

"I am very busy, Bianca."

"You need not be busy, you are Earl of Fairleigh; now Hugh has to work."

He saw the mistake she made, but did not attempt to contradict her.

"I like Hugh," went on Bianca. "When I am queen of Spain I'll make him a prince."

"You had better go to bed," said the new earl, gently; "it is getting late and you have a long journey before you to-morrow."

"Are we going to Spain?"

"Not quite so far."

"I wish," in a loud whisper, "you would not take Susan Green," pointing to the servant who, with rare tact, retreated to a corner of the room.

"Why not, Bianca?"

"I think she's going funny here," and Bianca tapped her own forehead meaningly. "And she's rude to me sometimes, and she forgets I'm her mistress."

"She must stay a little longer," putting a strong pressure on himself, and lingering with the poor creature against his will because of his solemn promise.

"Well, when I go to my court at Spain we'll leave her behind."

"Yes, she would not care to go to Spain."

"Tell her to pack up my things for to-morrow, Hugh, she won't do it unless you tell her; I ask her every day to get ready to go to Spain, but she never will."

"You must get everything ready for departure, Mrs. Green," said our hero, raising his voice. "Lady Fairleigh will leave here to-morrow."

Bianca clapped her hands.

"Lady Fairleigh, am I really that? You never called me so before."

"It is your title," he answered, shortly. "You are Countess of Fairleigh."

"And shall I have a crown?"

But he put her away from him and began giving directions in a low tone to the woman Bianca called Susan Green.

CHAPTER I.

REX.

A noticeable man with large grey eyes.
WORDSWORTH.

A DAINTY little sitting-room in a rambling old country house, and two brown heads in earnest conversation. Nothing to do with love. No tender, eloquent avowal; no bashful, hesitating acceptance. The two whose heads were so close together were not lovers, but brother and sister, while the conversation, which proved so all engrossing to them, was of nothing higher or more romantic than the thing few of us would confess to liking, and fewer still know how to do without; in a word—money.

The room was a boudoir exquisitely furnished in ebony and pale pink silk. Rare paintings adorned the walls. The mistress of the sanctum wore robes of rich trailing velvet, and was the wife of an English peer. Her companion had that unmistakable air of breeding, long descent, and moving in the best society alone can give, and yet the pair were honestly and really distressed for money.

"Can't the lawyers do anything?" asked the marchioness, looking up into her brother's face with an expression of perplexity. "I thought lawyers could always raise money when one wanted it."

Sir Reginald Dane laughed a little bitterly.

"My dear Georgie, you don't understand matters; women never do. I want three thousand pounds, and Leslie tells me he can't raise three hundred. Every acre of Allerton is mortgaged to its full value. I can't sell the old place. While I live Allerton must belong to the Danes. I owe a cool ten thousand, and that's little enough for a man in my position."

"But what will be the end of it?" asked Georgie, anxiously. "You can't live on air, Rex."

"Not exactly. I suppose it will be a case of an enforced sojourn in foreign parts. I shall exchange into a regiment bound for active service, and perhaps some barbarian will kindly give me a knock on the head, or an Indian fever carry me off."

Lady Desmond looked thoughtfully into the fire. She loved the handsome scapegrace before her as her own self. Her very blood ran cold at the melancholy picture he had conjured up.

"I wish you'd talk to Alick."

"I prefer talking to you. My dear child, your husband's one of the best fellows out, but I couldn't let him pay my debts. It wouldn't be honourable."

"But if you have debts—"

"They're to creditors; that's another thing. You may run into debt as often as people will trust you, Georgie, but you must never take money from a relation unless you see your way to paying it back. Honour's a peculiar thing."

"Very," dejectedly.

"Besides, it would take a clear fifty thousand to set me on my legs again."

"If only—"

"If only what?"

"If only you were like other people."

"I don't know anyone at present whom I'd like to resemble. I'm not such a very bad character, Georgie. The estates were fearfully encumbered when I came into them. At any rate, I've done nothing but spend my own; nothing to bring disgrace on the Danes of Allerton."

"It would be so nice if you could live at Allerton and keep up the old places. The house would want refurbishing, of course, and the grounds replanting, and all that sort of thing."

"You are planning for me to spend money, not find it, it appears to me, Georgie; besides, I should be moped to death at Allerton."

"I did not mean for you to live there alone; but if you married Rose—"

"As I experience considerable difficulty in keeping myself, it's very bad advice to suggest my undertaking to keep anyone else. No, I have done a good many foolish things in my time, but I never thought of encumbering myself with a wife."

"Never once, Rex?"

"Never once. I never in my life thought of marriage. I have been in love," reflectively, "about fifty times, but it never lasted more than a week."

"I am so glad."

"Are you? It appears to me there's very little to be glad about."

"I see a way out of all your difficulties."

"Well, I am sure I don't."

"If you have never thought of marriage, you can't have any fixed qualifications for your wife."

He raised his eyes in languid surprise, but did not interrupt her.

"And if you have been in love fifty times you can easily take the disorder for the fifty-first."

"Doubtful."

"In short, Rex, you must marry an heiress; someone rich enough to keep herself and pay off the mortgages on Allerton."

Sir Reginald's brow darkened.

"There's something very infra dig about marrying for money."

"Yes, if you only do it for money; but as your fancy seems free, you might combine interest and inclination."

"I should never be fortunate enough. I am emphatically an unlucky man, Georgie."

The young marchioness laid one hand on his shoulder and said gently:

"We are both Danes of Allerton, Rex; but the keeping up its old glories rests with you—you are the last of our house."

He laughed uneasily.

"England would get on very well without the Danes, Georgie."

"But I could not."

"Nonsense; you've got Alick, and the infant viscount, and—"

"And I want you, too."

"And so to keep me you propose to marry me to an heiress; they say all women are match-makers, but I did not expect you to develop the habit so early."

"Rex, will you think of it?"

"Will I put myself in the matrimonial market and publish the fact that I am to be purchased for fifty thousand pounds? I am afraid no one would give so much, Georgie."

The marchioness smiled.

"Have you ever heard of Rosamond Keith?"

"Your husband's ward—the child of that man who died insolvent."

"He didn't die insolvent—he died of heart disease when the company he had started failed."

"His daughter can't be an heiress."

"Indeed she is. She has a hundred thousand pounds, and it is hers absolutely from the day she is eighteen."

"Indeed."

"She is eighteen to-day, and Alick has gone to fetch her from the school where she was brought up. It was a strange will—Mr. Keith left her in my husband's charge, only she was to remain at school and never come to us even for a visit until she was eighteen. There is another guardian besides Alick, an old lawyer in the city."

"I don't see how this girl can be an heiress."

"The money came to her from her mother; I fancy, I don't know exactly."

"And you have never seen her?"

"Never."

"Poor Georgie, how I pity you, you will be saddled with a giggling schoolgirl of large appe-

title and hoydenish propensities; she will have red hands, freckles, and—

"Spare me, Rex."

"Or she will be of a religious turn, and fast on Fridays, and spend hours in private prayer."

Lady Desmond sighed.

"I'm sure I don't want to have her here, only I can't help it, and now you have told me all this trouble I thought it was quite providential."

"What, that Miss Keith should purchase the title of Lady Desmond? I couldn't do it, Georgie, I hate schoolgirls."

A footman entered then and lighted a number of wax candles—the marchioness never allowed gas in her sanctum, she preferred the softer light which suited so well with the dainty furniture and graceful nicknacks; a tray with tea followed, and Lady Desmond occupied herself with the cups and saucers.

"You'll have to take to something more solid when the heiress comes, schoolgirls have enormous appetites; that dishful of bread and butter would be a trifle to her."

"But we dine at seven, Rex," pecking away at her tiny tartine in a delicate bird-like way.

She was very pretty this capricious, dainty marchioness; below the middle height, and so delicately proportioned that she looked far less than her five-and-twenty years; a clear, healthy English complexion, laughing brown eyes, and nut-brown hair, the same tint as her brother's. Lord Desmond's pet name for his wife was "Gipsy," and never was title more appropriate.

Rex, or, in other words, Sir Reginald Dane, of Allerton, was a tall, muscular Englishman, with an easy calm of manner, a rare fascinating grace not in the least like his sister, one to take life much more calmly; seldom moved to joy or sorrow; fearing nothing in life except, perhaps, being bored; a general favourite, one of the fastest men about town, and yet with no special sin laid to his charge.

"Are you going to wait dinner?" asked Rex, resigning his empty cup. "Is my future proprietress to arrive to-night?"

"I expect the carriage every minute, Rex," with a persuasive look. "Will you think seriously of what I have said?"

For one instant he grew grave.

"I'm not at all sure, Georgie, whether life in India wouldn't be pleasanter than domesticity in England with a girl I hate."

"You may not hate her."

"I always hate whatever is offered me; it's only the things I can't get I value."

Her brown eyes looked thoughtfully into his grey ones.

"I cannot think of anything else."

"My dear, don't bother your head about me, I shall fall on my feet somehow, I always do," and then he kissed her lightly on the forehead and left the room.

Poor Lady Desmond! his suggestions troubled her strangely as she sat in her cosy boudoir. What if Miss Keith really proved a disagreeable inmate; the marchioness prided herself very much on the perfect fitness of everything in her establishment; what on earth should she do with a schoolgirl?

She had assented to her husband's wish that his ward should live with them without a scruple. With Rex's fancy portrait before her she began to regret her compliance. Only one hope comforted her, the faint chance that Rex might yet be brought to accept his salvation—that is, Rosamond Keith and her fortune.

At present no other guests were staying in the house. The marquis and marchioness were not afraid of occasional tête-à-têtes. In another week a few intimates might come, but for the most part they led a quiet family life at the Towers, and reserved their gaieties for their town house during the London season.

The sound of wheels dashing up the avenue aroused Georgie from her reverie. A few minutes later a tall, distinguished-looking man entered, followed by a small, shrinking figure hid in wraps. The marquis greeted his wife warmly, then he introduced his companion.

"Miss Keith is almost frozen, Georgie. It is a bitter night."

The marchioness did all that could have been expected of her. She drew a chair near the fire for her guest, and began asking friendly questions about the journey. However, the answers she obtained were very short and almost inaudible. Poor Miss Keith seemed very uneasy in the dainty boudoir. She sat with her eyes on the ground, never once raising them to her hostess.

Georgie had not the least idea whether she was plain or pretty. The marchioness felt provoked. She wanted to know what sort of a girl she had designed for her sister-in-law. At last she tired of the "Yes" and "No," which was all she could extract from her silent guest, and proposed that Miss Keith should take off her things.

Rosamond Keith assented in silence. Lady Desmond decided she would have consented to anything. She led the way down a long passage to two pretty rooms opening into each other. A fire blazed cheerfully in each, and the candles were lighted.

"I will send you a maid," she said, kindly. "We do not dine till seven, so you need not hurry."

An inaudible "Thank you." Georgie tried again.

"I hope you will try to be happy with us."

Those words broke down the girl's reserve. With one sob she clung to Lady Desmond, crying as if her heart would break.

"My dear child, what is the matter?"

She sat down and made the girl lean against her. Bit by bit it came out. Rosamond Keith had never been acquainted with the provisions of her father's will, which forbade all communication between her and the Desmonds until she should be eighteen. Their neglect had hurt the girlish heart. She had thought them cruel and unkind, looking on her as a burden. She had made herself perfectly wretched at the thought of living with them.

"It was so dreary at Brighton, Lady Desmond," sobbed the girl, with pitiful earnestness. "I did so long for someone to write to me, or come and see me. I used to hear of you and see your name in the 'Queen.' Once, too, you came to Brighton, and, oh, it did seem so very hard."

"My dear Miss Keith, we did not mean to be unkind. It was your poor father's wish."

"Did you know him, Lady Desmond?"

"No," admitted Georgie. "He died before I married; but he was my husband's dearest friend, and we both wish to be friends to his daughter."

"Thank you. Oh, I am so sorry to trouble you, but I can't help coming here."

"We are very pleased to see you. How you shiver! My dear child, did you expect us to be cold?"

"I thought Lord Desmond would be very—very old and cross."

Georgie laughed.

"I think you will confess your mistake in a very few days. Pray what fancy picture did you draw of me?"

"I do not know. I was sure you would hate me, and think me a trouble. Oh, Lady Desmond, if you could only tell the relief it was to see you."

"Well, I will promise not to be very terrible. Now, I must go away and send someone to help you to dress, or we shall both be late for dinner."

Half an hour later Lady Desmond returned to the pretty room she had selected for her guest. Entering in obedience to the "Come in," she stood for a moment spellbound by astonishment. This was the first view she had had of Miss Keith. Downstairs her wraps had concealed her face and figure, and when she knelt sobbing at her side the marchioness had only noticed that she had large eyes.

She saw her now with every trace of tears removed, dressed in soft flowing white, with no ornaments excepting a spray of ivy, which the maid had taken from a vase on the table, and Lady Desmond, who had seen all the beauties of several London seasons, confessed she had

never looked on a lovelier face than Rosamond Keith's.

There was nothing of the schoolgirl about her. Shy and timid she might be, but yet she had a gentle dignity all her own. Her hair was of that brown which looked golden in the sunlight, her eyes dark hazel, with long lashes which drooped over her delicate skin, a complexion of the palest carmine, small, arched lips, a high, open forehead. Such was Rosamond, and her guardian's wife decided her verdict at once.

"She is perfect. Oh, if Rex would only like her!"

Then for one instant she repented her scheme. There was something so pure and noble about Rosamond Keith that for anyone to marry her without love seemed a crime. For all time the two women remembered this night. Their acquaintance brought to one bitterest pain, to the other a great disappointment. Yet no unkind word passed between them. Rosamond never forgot the kindness of her reception. The marchioness remembered the girl's sweet loveliness even when she had grown to wish she had never crossed the threshold of Desmond Towers.

CHAPTER II.

A LOVE DREAM.

And the heart that is soonest awake to the flowers
Is always the first to be touched by the thorns.

MOORE.

A DAY in spring, when the April sun shone brightly, the air was soft and balmy, the wild birds uttered their twittering song, and the yellow primroses were spread like a thick golden carpet beneath Rosamond's feet, as she sat on a grassy mound in the grounds of Desmond Towers, her hat lying idly at her side, her thoughts busy with things far away.

For nearly five months she had lived at the Towers. For nearly five months she had led the pleasant, luxurious existence which prevails among the nobility; she had grown to love the marchioness as a dear elder sister, and to look on her guardian almost as a second father. Her days had seemed a dream of happiness, and now a shadow had fallen on her sunshine, a sorrow had come—Sir Reginald Dane was going to leave the Towers.

He had not lived there the entire length of Rosamond's sojourn, but he had been continually backwards and forwards, not a week had passed without his coming; the marquis welcomed him gladly, the marchioness loved him, and Rosamond, Heaven help her, had grown to love him more dearly still, to love him with that pure passion, that intense affection known as first love.

She loved him. To her Sir Reginald was a king among men; she looked up to him with a reverence which was half fearful, half admiring, and wholly touching. She never guessed her own secret until the news arrived that Sir Reginald was going abroad; he was coming to-day to say good-bye.

His sister told Rosamond, told her with a smile on her lips, and the girl, who only kept back her tears by a supreme effort of pride, wondered how anyone could hear the news so calmly, and then she went away that she might be alone, and let her sorrow have its sway. Going abroad, going to India, he might be away three years. The girl's heart felt near to breaking in her anguish.

She longed with a bitter longing to have the right to go with him, to be at his side in danger, to form, as it were, a part of his life. She was a child no longer, her woman's heart had awoke, and, alas, awoke to suffering.

"All alone, Miss Keith?"

She looked up, Sir Reginald stood before her, his grey eyes watching her with keen interest. He was a beauty-lover, everything lovely in art or nature had charms for him; he had come at last to his sister's view, this girl was fair and graceful. She would make a noble mistress for Allerton, her fortune would free him of his difficulties, he meant to offer her his hand.

Sir Reginald could not quite have described his own feelings for Rosamond, he hardly suspected the hold she had on his heart, how her pure innocence had appealed to all that was noblest in him. The baronet had regarded her all along as a flower that might be his if he chose to stoop and gather it; he himself had said he valued nothing he could have; he told himself she was a pretty child, that she would reflect honour on his grand old name.

He never admitted that she was a beautiful woman, who held his heart, yet so it was. He meant to propose to her for interested motives. Ere very long he would have given up rank, name, and fortune for a smile from her lips.

"I like to be alone," answered Rosamond. "I mean—" becoming conscious of the rudeness of the remark, "I like being out here."

"You are fond of the country?"

"Yes."

A silence ensued. He had come to meet her for the express purpose of asking her to marry him, and now the task seemed difficult.

"Have you seen Lady Desmond?" asked Rosamond, who was nervously afraid of every pause.

"No, Georgie is out, she did not expect me so soon."

"How sorry she will be. Sir Reginald, when are you going to India?"

He took her hand and held it in both of his, and looked straight into her hazel eyes.

"Shall you miss me just a little, Rosamond?"

"Yes," with a crimson blush, "indeed I shall."

"I need not go at all if you bid me stay. Rosamond; will you tell me to stay in England?"

"I must not," misunderstanding him. "Lady Desmond said you were obliged to go."

"Not if you bid me stay—a man's duty to his wife comes before his duty to all else, Rosamond. Will you promise to be mine, will you give yourself to me? Heaven knows," he added, eagerly, "I am not worthy of you. My whole life is not fit to match your pure, innocent one, only, my darling, I will make you happy—your years shall be like one summer's day, you shall never know a sorrow."

She looked up at him with her clear eyes, a look of such love and trust that his conscience smote him.

"You have made me very happy. Nothing in the world could make me so happy as to be with you."

His arm was round her. The fair head drooped on his shoulder.

"Then you will be mine? Rosamond, you will be my wife?"

"How strange it sounds," she said, wistfully—"your wife."

"My wife—my garden flower. Rosamond, no other name could suit you so well. Rose of the world—my Rose."

"I like your name, too," she whispered. "Rex means king."

"If I am a king," he said, meaningly, "you must be queen. When will you come to your kingdom, Rosamond?"

She was silent. Sir Reginald had pressing reasons for desiring an early marriage, for the embarrassments he had spoken of to his sister in the autumn were very heavy.

"June is the month of roses," he whispered, caressingly, in the low, tender voice which always softened almost without effort when speaking to a woman. "Will you give yourself to me, then, Rosamond, when your namesake flowers are in bloom?"

"Rex," she murmured, speaking his name almost unconsciously. "Rex, are you quite—quite sure. I am very young, you know, and you—you might marry anyone."

"I don't want to marry anyone," he answered, laughing. "I want a fair white rose; I do not care for any other flower."

Long afterwards, when fate had parted them; when these golden days were over, and winter's black clouds had come, the sight of a pure white rose always filled him with bitter regret. But Rosamond had no misgivings. She sat on

in the sweet spring sunshine, her head pillowed on her lover's shoulder, her hand clasped in his. She seemed then to have not a care or a sorrow. She thought her whole future must be happy because it was to be spent at this man's side.

"Rex," shyly.

"Yes," he answered, smiling. "I never liked my name so well before."

"When did you first begin to like me?"

He was silent just a second. He could not tell her that before they ever met she had been suggested as a desirable wife.

"It is so long ago, Rosamond. Don't you know, little one, you have a face made to take hearts by storm?"

"I want no other, Rex, but yours."

Just then it flashed across him all she was giving him—her beauty, her wealth, her love. Sir Reginald was a proud man; it almost vexed him to take so much.

"Do you know, child, how men will envy me?" he asked her, fondly. "Do you know, Rosamond, that when you are presented all London will rave of your beauty?"

She shook her head.

"You flatter me." Then after a pause:

"But I don't want to be presented."

"Why not? It is not a very formidable ceremony."

"Lady Desmond told me the other day—"

"You ought to say Georgie. You will be sisters, you know."

She blushed hotly.

"Georgie told me that by papa's will, before I was presented, I must go and stay a week with my other guardian, Mr. Ashley."

"What a very strange arrangement."

"I don't want to go."

"He must not keep you a day beyond the week, Rosamond, or I shall be coming to know the reason."

"I do dread going so."

The seriousness of her manner impressed Sir Reginald.

"What a timid child you are. However cold and stern he may be to others, he can't be unkind to you. There is something in your eyes, Rosamond, that disarms anger. I cannot fancy anyone saying a harsh word to you."

And yet not so long afterwards he himself spoke the words which pierced her heart with a sharper pain than any she had ever dreamed of.

"I cannot explain it," said the girl, dreamily. "I only know I dread going to Mr. Ashley's. It is so strange, Rex, in all my dreams of the future I never seem to fancy coming back from there. The day I leave here has always seemed the boundary line of my life."

Rex laughed.

"What a superstitious child you are."

She was just a little hurt.

"I cannot help it. I have a presentiment I shall be unhappy there. I feel as if Mr. Ashley would bring some trouble on me, I do, indeed, Rex."

"I never saw him in my life, but report speaks of him as a most worthy man, and he was your father's dearest friend."

"Yes," softly, "that is why I cannot refuse to go to him."

"Shall we walk back to the house?" he suggested, at last. "Georgie will think us lost."

"Do you think she will be angry, Rex?"

"Dreadfully!" Then as the girl's frightened face told him the question was asked seriously, he added: "She will be delighted. For the last seven years she has been urging me to marry."

Rosamond had risen now. She stood with her eyes bent on the fair scene before her.

"I shall never forget this afternoon, Rex—never; if I live to be quite old."

They neither of them ever did forget it. It often came back to both at memory's silent touch. Somehow in after years the pale glory of primroses in the April sunshine made Sir Reginald strangely grave and silent. Somehow in time to come, when on visits to his sister, he specially shunned this portion of the grounds.

"It is the tenth of April," answered Rex. "I shall never forget this day when you gave

yourself to me, Rosamond. Will you not give me something else?"

"I would give you anything in the world, Rex."

He gathered her in his arms then and kissed her passionately. He kissed her then as the woman he loved, not the heiress he had wooed. His lips were pressed to hers again and again, and she showed no displeasure. The colour deepened on her face. These caresses, this close, loving embrace seemed to make her more entirely his, to give her the right to love him. Sir Reginald led Rosamond straight to the little boudoir where she had first seen Lady Desmond. The marchioness sat alone, a strange gravity about her bright face. Her brother brought Miss Keith up to her.

"Georgie, Rosamond has promised to be my wife. I want you to tell her how glad you are."

The marchioness kissed her future sister very kindly.

"Heaven grant Rex may make you happy, Rosamond," she said, earnestly. "Rex, you are very fortunate."

And months after Rosamond recalled the words, and understood better why all Lady Desmond's anxiety was for her, not for her brother. She never forgot how that same evening the marquise called her into his study.

"Do you think you shall be happy, Rosamond? Are you doing this of your own free will?"

Strange questions. She answered "Yes" to both.

"My wife is very young," said the marquise, simply, "and she is devoted to her brother. I love Rex myself, but I should not like to think you had been persuaded by us to marry him."

Rosamond explained simply that she had not been persuaded. It was her own happiness she had consulted.

"You had better write to Mr. Ashley," said Lord Desmond. "I shall write myself, but it will be wiser for you to do so too."

No letter had even taken Rosamond more time and trouble to compose. She wrote it in Lord Desmond's study, and the peer himself was surprised at the quantity of paper she wasted in preliminary efforts.

"One comfort," she said, simply, "perhaps now Mr. Ashley won't want me to go and stay with him."

But the lawyer's reply came by return of post, and it was short and peremptory. He requested his ward to come to London at once and spend that week under his roof that had been specially alluded to in her father's will. He also desired—and this clause gave great offence to the marchioness—that she would come alone.

(To be Continued.)

KEEP AHEAD.

ONE of the grand secrets of success in life is to keep ahead in all ways possible. If you once fall behind, it may be very difficult to make up the headway which is lost. One who begins with putting aside some of his earnings, however small, and keeps it up for a number of years, is likely to become rich before he dies. One who inherits property, and goes on year by year spending a little more than his income, will become poor if he lives long enough. Living beyond their means has brought multitudes of persons to ruin in our generation. It is the cause of nine-tenths of all the defalcations which have disgraced the age. Bankers and business men in general do not often help themselves to other people's money until their own funds begin to fall off, and their expenditures exceed their receipts.

A man who is in debt walks in the midst of perils. It cannot but impair a man's self-respect to know that he is living at the expense of others. It is also very desirable that we should keep somewhat ahead in our work. This may not be possible in all cases; as, for instance,

when a man's work is assigned to certain fixed hours, like that of the operatives in a mill. But there are certain classes of people who can choose their time for the work which they are called to do, and amongst them those who invariably put off the task assigned them as long as possible, and then come to its performance hurried, perplexed, anxious, confused—in such a state of mind as certainly unfits them for doing their best work. Get ahead and keep ahead, and your success is tolerably sure.

HIRED DRESSES.

To what shifts will women resort who are really fond of dress! In our large cities it is quite customary for ladies to hire costumes in which to attend balls. "We have various kinds of customers," said one of these costumiers. "Sometimes a lady from another city, staying at an hotel, wants to go to a ball, and she comes to me. Some of my customers are ladies who tend shops. They don't go to balls often, but when they do go they want to go right, and they save their money for it. White satin brings the highest price, then white silk, and then light corn colour. The easier the dirt and the stains come on 'em, the more we get. The blue and the green don't bring so much, and the slate colour and dark red we hire out cheap. Dressmakers never hire out dresses, but second-hand dealers do. They buy them of rich ladies who get tired of them. The dresses cost a high price when they are new, and the ladies won't be seen in them more than two or three times, and when they sell them they let them go cheap. As a rule, they come back to us in good order; and as they are well made, and we obtain a good price for them, the business pays very well."

TRIALS OF CLERKS.

Most trying to the patience of the salesman is the lady shopper who is always inquiring the price of everything without intending to buy. While waiting once for a package, I chanced to stand near a new kind of dress material, over which a consumptive-looking youth was presiding. One lady approached, examined, inquired name and value, and passed on, and another repeated the question. So on till six in five minutes asked the same. No wonder the youth wore a stony expression, that his words came like the monotonous utterance of the parrot. They were natural questions, perhaps, and easily answered, but in time decidedly wearing. There is another class who are always seeking samples. It would seem as if those tiny bits of bright colour and soft texture held them in a state of fascination, and they prize them not for the possibility of future purchase, but as possessing intrinsic value. They argue that the clerk is paid to perform certain duties, and should do so; he is the servant of the public. Doubtless, but he has his rights and they should be regarded.—H.

HOME INFLUENCE.

CHILDREN imitate their elders almost unconsciously. It is hard for a young mother, who has not yet overcome the wayward tendencies of her own youthful nature, to realise the influence she exerts over her little ones. She is constantly surrounded by critical imitators, who copy her morals and her manners. As the mother is, so are her sons and daughters. If a family of children are blessed with an intelligent mother, who is dainty and refined in her manners, and who does not consider it necessary to be one woman in the drawing-room and an entirely different person in everyday life, but who is a true mother, and who is always a tender, charming woman, you will invariably see her habits of speech and her perfect manners repeated in her

children. Great, rough men and noisy, busy boys will always tone down their voices and step quietly, and try to be more mannerly, when she stops to give them a kind word and a pleasant smile. Think of this seriously, mothers.

TIME'S REVENGE;

OR,

FOILED AT THE LAST.

CHAPTER XXI.

THE ACCUSING PAST.

Sure some malignant planet
Which long has spared me, now of late begins
To shed on me its baleful influence. LEE.

LADY ALLENBY had sent for Beattie because a dressmaker had come down from a great London house—her ladyship did not as yet order her "costumes" from Worth—and it seemed a good opportunity to let Miss Allenby add to her scanty wardrobe. It was not desirable that Miss Rochester should hear any humiliating admissions, therefore Lady Allenby wished to see her step-daughter alone for a few minutes at least.

But when Beattie entered the room, ignorant of the reason why she had been sent for, she found a startling scene of confusion. Lady Allenby was lying back in what appeared to be violent hysterics, two or three maids trying to restore her, Dr. Astley standing by with a grave face. The dressmaker stood near the window, dismayed. Silks, satins, velvets, laces, fringes, lay scattered about in splendid profusion, glittering like the hues of a rainbow.

The cool professional eye of the doctor told him that Lady Allenby's attack was simply a bit of affectation. He therefore took no part whatever in the attempts to revive her apparently scattered senses, and was turning to depart when Beattie suddenly appeared. Having no time to lose, Dr. Astley at once spoke to her.

"Are you Miss Allenby? You are? Very well, my dear, I wish to speak to you. Come this way."

He led her to a pretty little ante-room, then, fixing his penetrating gaze upon her, he continued:

"My child, you are a stranger to me, and I have no time to be nice and careful in choosing words, for I am in great haste. Are you brave and strong? Can you bear bad news? I have sad, terrible news to tell you."

Beattie's thoughts flew to Percy in a moment. Then she thought of Fayette. She turned very white, and trembled.

"If you tell me quickly," she said, in a half whisper, "I think I can hear the worst news without flinching." She looked wistfully at him, then suddenly remembered the state in which she had just seen her stepmother, and a faint glimmer of the tragic truth dawned upon her mind. Dr. Astley put his finger on her wrist.

"Your father," he said, watching her pulse as he spoke—"he has been very unwell for some time past, and we have feared that at any moment—"

Beattie looked at him, her face again blanching.

"My father is—he is not dead?" she asked, in a low, terrified voice. But Dr. Astley's compassionate look was enough.

"Child, have you any friend, anybody who could be with you for a short time, to help you?" he said, as the young girl glanced about in a dazed, half-stunned manner. "Lady Allenby—I fear she can scarcely—what female friends have you? You are a good girl. There is no nonsense about you. You must be brave, for you will have great responsibilities cast upon you. But do not be dismayed. Powerful protectors will watch over your interests, and help you."

Beattie listened as if in a dream. It would be idle to say she felt sorrow for the sudden loss of

a father whom she had never known, and had seen for the first time the previous day. But she felt a shock of horrified surprise, and a terrified sense of helplessness seized her. She clung to the doctor's hand for a moment, and looked at him without speaking.

"Is there anyone in this house in whose care I can leave you," he said, "Lady Allenby being ill?"

"Miss Rochester is here. I think she would stay if I begged her to do so," replied Beattie.

"Come to the blue drawing-room and I will send someone to find her," said Dr. Astley. "Take my arm."

Jessie Rochester had heard the news. Her father had arrived, and she was just going to leave the house when Beattie's message stopped her. She instantly went to the room where her new friend was waiting for her. At a hint from the doctor, she agreed to remain until the next day with Beattie, running with cheerful readiness to ask her papa to go home again, and send her maid back to her in the carriage with a box of necessary clothes.

The hours dragged themselves away. Lady Allenby, recovering from her sham hysterics, ordered the dressmaker to telegraph to London for the most expensive black stuffs and crapes that her world-renowned firm could send down. She was as possible more inflated in her manner than she had been before, and although guarded towards Beattie, behaved in an impertinently patronising way which made Jessie furious.

True to his word, Mr. Fielding returned early the following day, accompanied by one of his clerks. Sir Gerald had gone for one of his long rides early in the morning, chiefly to escape meeting any of the three ladies. For the present he deemed it wisest he should avoid Jessie, though he intended to renew his siege when he had formally entered on possession of the great Altenham estates. On his return he found the solicitor, with the aid of an appraiser from Garston, the neighbouring town, busy making an inventory. Mr. Fielding merely returned the salutation of Sir Gerald briefly and coldly. His manner a little irritated Sir Gerald, inflated by his new position, but with a guilty self-consciousness, he did not venture to show any resentment.

"I suppose you know what necessary arrangements to make?" he said, almost timidly.

"Certainly," answered Mr. Fielding. "I am obliged to take all the needful duties upon myself, as there is no one else to order matters, and I am the family solicitor."

"You do not require any directions from me?"

"From you? Undoubtedly not. The only person here who has power to issue instructions, orders, or directions is Miss Allenby, and she is not capable of either comprehending these business matters or of exerting herself at the present moment."

"I do not understand you. I, and I alone, am master here," said Sir Gerald, in an insolent tone, but pulling the long ends of his moustache with nervous fingers.

"Pardon me. I think you are under some serious error. You are no more master to-day than you were yesterday morning," said Mr. Fielding, coldly.

Sir Gerald looked him full in the face, to see if these words meant some ill-timed jest. At that moment the clerk and the appraiser quitted the room, and Mr. Fielding crossed and shut the door.

"Sit down, Sir Gerald Allenby," he said, sternly. "It would be cruel to allow you to remain under a delusion which would be the more unfortunate the longer it lasted. Listen to me for a few minutes. Your nephew, my late client, Sir Hubert, has died suddenly; he intended to make a second will, the first having not only been rendered invalid by his marriage with the present Lady Allenby, but an unsatisfactory one, as it provided only for the wife then living and his daughter. He meant to largely benefit you, but it was through the shock of hearing your past disgrace—silence for a

moment—that he died—died literally of a broken heart, before he could even write down his intentions."

Sir Gerald had made several attempts to speak, but the words had died away on his lips.

"You are talking all this audacious jargon to me," he said, at length, savagely, "in order to bamboozle me—or to try to do so. You have no child to deal with! The Altenham property is unentailed; my nephew died leaving no will except the old one, which you say is useless. I am his only male relative, and therefore the next of kin, and I take all."

"Nothing of the kind. Had he died childless—were Miss Allenby to die now—you would of necessity inherit everything. As it is, Sir Hubert's daughter stands alone, mistress of the Altenham estates. Lady Allenby is shut out by her jointure, and unfortunately for her, it is her own money which has been settled on her."

"But what you assert is impossible."

"It is perfectly correct, Miss Allenby takes the freeholds as heiress, and also the remainder. I should have strongly advised Miss Allenby to assign you a larger income than what you hold at present, but for knowing that you were purposely shut out by Sir Randal. He left with me a letter, which I unhappily showed too abruptly to Sir Hubert yesterday. He considered that you had disgraced him and all your family—"

"In what way?" furiously demanded Sir Gerald, resolved to know the worst.

"Here is a copy of his letter," said Mr. Fielding. "This is the paper which your nephew read yesterday—which killed him as surely as if it had been a pistol shot."

He threw down a written paper on the table. Sir Gerald mechanically took it up, although he surmised its contents, and read it, his thoughts rushing on other things like a torrent of turbid water. As he imagined, it was a detailed account written by his brother, Sir Randal, of that crime which he had fancied safe buried in the dim past. Ten years before he had forged his brother's name, obtaining thereby five thousand pounds, which he had wasted in idle, if not wicked, pleasures. Sir Randal had hushed up this family dishonour, but had never pardoned the criminal. He would not let it be known to the world, but he resolved as far as he could to shut out Gerald from ownership of the old family home. He confided the secret to Mr. Fielding, imploring him to warn both Alexander and Hubert if absolutely necessary, but not otherwise.

Gerald flung the paper on the table again. He wanted to think, but his brain seemed stunned for the moment. With a glance of vindictive hatred at Mr. Fielding he went out of the room. Could it be true, this crushing information flung to him with such contempt? If true, what position did he occupy? He had been so confident in the sense of ownership, so triumphant in the idea that he was lord of Altenham, that this tide of adversity setting in was doubly awful. If this evil news were true, could he dispute it in a court of law? He had no means.

A few words uttered by Mr. Fielding repeated themselves over and over in his ears: "Were Miss Allenby to die, you would of necessity inherit everything." As he turned his head, a cold dew on his forehead, the sentence seemed written in letters of fire upon the walls. But she was not likely to die. And her lover, the man to whom she was probably engaged, happened to be a man who hated him. If it were true that she was owner of the great Altenham estates she would be free to do as she pleased, even if she became a ward in Chancery, and no doubt would elect to marry Percy Darvill at once.

Yet the accident of a moment might snap the thread of her young life. With a guilty terror, inspired by his own thoughts, he started at some light sound. But, he again told himself, she was not likely to die. Then his thoughts reverted to Margaret Lascelles and her daring scheme. He did not care to face

Mr. Fielding again, and was determined on ascertaining without delay what his actual rights were, so, leaving a message for Lady Allenby, he started off for London. And on the way the words kept echoing in his ear, with diabolical persistency, "Were Miss Allenby to die!"

Lady Allenby insisted on seeing Mr. Fielding, and drove him into telling her the disagreeable truth. She was furious, and forgetting her dignity as a great lady, descended into absolute abuse, vowing vengeance on everybody, and declaring that it was only a conspiracy to cheat her. Mr. Fielding strongly advised Beattie to accept an invitation pressed by Jessie Rochester, who wished her to pass the next few days with her at her own home. To the delight of both girls, it was settled that this should be so, Lady Allenby making no objection.

"I would not tell you so before," whispered Jessie, as they entered the carriage to depart, "but to-morrow Percy Darvill is coming down to see papa."

CHAPTER XXII.

TOWARDS THE LIGHT.

Who can look into the seeds of Time
And see which grain will grow, and which will
not?
SHAKESPEARE.

MARGARET LASCELLES chafed in her room like a disabled lioness. The inactivity, the loss of her freedom, kept her in a nervous, irritated state. The silence and solitude made her wretched. Sometimes she felt as if she could have welcomed even Prue Ibbotson. She could not even relieve her over-excited feelings by marching up and down, to and fro, for her foot continued painful, and she could hardly stand. There was nothing to do. Even had she cared for reading there were no books within the walls of the "Three Jolly Ploughboys," but the only kind of reading she could endure was the careless skimming of modern French novels.

But the day following Prue Ibbotson's visit she rang the bell in desperation. When Sarah, the maid of all work, lumbered up in answer, she asked impatiently if the landlord could find her a newspaper, or something to read—to while away the time.

"I'll see, mim," said Sarah, who was on her best behaviour before the strange lady.

Presently, having carried her message, she returned with a paper, which she laid with great ceremony on the little table beside Margaret.

"Thank you," said the lady.

When Sarah had closed the door with elaborate care, Margaret eyed the paper. It was smudged with brown rings, and emitted a strong odour of coarse tobacco. Margaret took it up daintily in her white fingers but dropped it instantly.

"Faugh!" said she, burying her face for relief in a big bunch of roses standing in a china jar on the table.

But utter weariness forced her to take up the newspaper again. She looked at it half vacantly, certain there would not be one item of interest in its pages; then started: her eye caught the title—"The *Althshire Mercury*." It was the local journal of the county in which Altenham was situated, and perhaps there might be some slight mention of the Allenby family.

With a smile of disbelief in her success in searching, she eagerly scanned each closely-printed page. She had glanced swiftly down every column and was about to turn the paper back again, when a cry escaped her—a quick, sharp cry of amazement. At the bottom of the last page she had examined was a short paragraph headed thus:—"MELANCHOLY AND SUDDEN DEATH OF SIR HUBERT ALLENBY."

"Dead!" cried Margaret Lascelles. "Dead! Well, what then? Is my way easier—or is it closed? Idiot, idiot that I was to betray my tactics to Gerald Allenby. I must have been mad. If he is now in possession of the Altenham estates, he will know my secrets, my plan of action. Oh, what folly have I been guilty of—I, who pride myself on my tact, my diplomatic

skill! The game is lost before the cards have been dealt. But let me see."

She eagerly read the paragraph, which briefly mentioned the unexpected death of Sir Hubert, from, it was believed, heart disease. It was reported that an inquest would be held, and rumour said that the only daughter of the deceased baronet would inherit the whole of the large estates, as they were not entailed, and it was said that Sir Hubert had left no will. There was no mention of Gerald, nor of the widowed Lady Allenby.

"Can it be true?" exclaimed Margaret Lascelles. "I hardly dare to hope it. Fate has surely sent this message to me. I must see this Gerald Allenby at once and at all hazards. If he is left without an inch of the Altenham property he will be ready to do my bidding. But which way does my interest lie? This girl, this Allenby girl, takes all, they think: Would it be to my interest to boldly tell the truth to this girl—of mine, and claim my own reward for helping her to prove her right? Poo! trust to the gratitude and generosity of an Allenby! Not me. Yet the other way is so hazardous, and I must put myself at the mercy of my accomplice—for accomplices I shall be obliged to have. This Fayette girl is just one of those fair-faced, smooth-voiced minxes who are secretly full of spite, and she would be in such an awful rage if I told her the truth—and then that old Prue Ibbotson would have her say. No, no. Better adhere to my scheme. But I will return to London to-morrow at all risks."

She rang again for the patient Sarah, who presently framed her stout figure in the sombre doorway, an unfailing smile on her round, rosy, shiny face.

"Could you find anybody who could go to Miss Ibbotson's house for me?" asked Margaret Lascelles, in her sweetest, most persuasive tone. "I wish to know most particularly if she is coming here this afternoon, as I have something very important to tell her."

Sarah shook her round, bullety head with the seriousness of a Chinese grande.

"There ain't nobody to go, mim," she said.

"I'd go, and with pleasure too, mim, for t'obeege you, but missis can't spare me, it being our washing day, you know, mim. Likewise, you know, mim—"

"There, there, thank you, my good girl. Never mind," exclaimed Margaret Lascelles, impatiently.

Sarah turned to depart, but as if struck by an idea, wheeled round again.

"Not but, mim," she said, in her most solemn manner, "I thinks as the ladies is a coming to see you, for I see them just now a walking along the road, a coming: this way. They was just by the big tree in the middle of the road, mim; but perhaps you don't happen to know it, like."

"Why could you not have told me that before?" said Margaret Lascelles, angrily. "You are an idiot, girl—go."

As she spoke, the firm step of Miss Ibbotson was heard as she ascended the staircase, and a moment or two later she entered. Sarah curtsied, mumbled some kind of greeting, and lumbered off. Miss Ibbotson was apparently trembling with excitement. Her keen grey eyes were glittering; her nose was pink all over; two patches of red glowed on her cheeks and she walked in with a jerk.

"Good-day," she said, nodding to Margaret.

"I hope your ankle is getting on better. I left Fayette downstairs, as I didn't know whether or no you would care to see her. I have had most unexpected news this morning—a letter from Beatrice Allenby, a note from Mr. Fielding, the family solicitor of the Allenbys, and a telegram from—hem, hem—the gentleman to whom I am engaged."

"Well?" responded Margaret, drily.

"Well—hem, hem—a sad—a what shall I say?—a most melancholy—an unexpected bereavement has deprived our young friend, Beatrice, of her father."

"Indeed!" gasped Margaret, languidly. "Is Sir Hubert dead, then?"

With an adroit movement of her foot she rapidly pushed the "Albion Mercury" aside, as it lay on the floor, so as to hide it under her trailing skirt.

"Yes. Died suddenly; died without a will, and as far as I can make out, Beattie is heiress to the great Altenham property. The uncle, that Gerald, you know, who came for the child will have nothing."

Margaret trifled with her chain for a moment, then slowly drawled:

"What a sad affair—I mean Sir Hubert's, dying. He was a comparatively young man. Well?"

"Well, that's all. But I have heard from—hem, hem—from Mr. Fordham, the gentleman I am going to marry. Circumstances have occurred to alter our arrangements, and our marriage must take place earlier than was intended—hem, hem." Miss Prue cleared her voice with some little trouble, then went on: "I called to-day to ask what you may intend doing. I shall be compelled to go to London; I am going to stay with an aunt of Mr. Fordham's, and we are to have a very—hem, hem—quiet wedding. We had arranged to be married here, but Mr. Fordham is obliged to leave England within three weeks."

"Well?" calmly inquired Margaret.

"Well," irritably repeated Prue, almost with a snarl. "If I go, I must either take Fayette with me, or leave her with you. It may not suit you if she goes with me. But I have found some people to take The Sycamores off my hands, buy the furniture, engage the two servants, and so on—at least a friend of mine, Mr. Arundel, found them. So I want to know what you are going to do—what you would like me to do with regard to the child."

"I had intended going back to town to-morrow," said Margaret, quietly. "And if Fayette—what do you call her?—if she will come to me by twelve o'clock, she can go with me. When do you go?"

"At the end of the week."

A slight mist dimmed the eyes of Miss Ibbotson as she reflected that possibly she might be parting with Fayette for ever.

"She ought to come up. I will call her. But, by the way, have you remembered the name of the place in Scotland where you and Alexander Alienby were married?"

Margaret Lascelles had resolved to boldly invent a name, for she could afterwards either deny that she had mentioned the place, or assert that Prue's memory deceived her as to the actual name.

"Slogan," she said, with a candid smile. "Such a pretty, picturesque place. I have some letters of Alexander's, addressed to me as his wife. But—but pray," she went on, lifting her hands as if in entreaty, "do not talk about all that now. I am so nervous—so—"

"Very well. I don't want to pry into your affairs unnecessarily," said Miss Ibbotson. "I suppose it is all right; I hope so. I will call Fayette."

The young girl was sitting near the door idly watching the chickens, the ducks, and the pigeons, trying not to think. She came immediately in answer to Miss Prue's call. Margaret Lascelles watched her keenly, though with half closed eyes, as she entered. To Margaret's secret annoyance, the nervous timidity which had marked Fayette's manner before had disappeared. Instead of approaching her with agitation, with suppressed yearning and half stifled tears, she slowly advanced, pale, dignified, almost stern.

"Darling, sweet," murmured Margaret, holding out her arms.

"You wished to see me," said Fayette, in a low, sad voice, submitting to be kissed effusively.

It was no longer she who pressed unacceptable kisses on an unwilling cheek.

"I sincerely hope and devoutly trust that some honest, deserving young man may soon see this dear child, and marry her, and take her away from this deceitful, cold-hearted woman,"

thought Miss Prue, looking at the pale face of Fayette.

The young girl heard the sudden determination of her mother to take her away with an unmoved countenance. Margaret Lascelles furtively watched her, mystified. She had flattered herself that this delicate creature would have been like wax in her hands, but there was a cold dignity in her manner which surprised and alarmed the plotting woman. She made a great effort to coax, and win her good opinion, but it was too late. While willing to yield dutiful obedience, it was no longer in Fayette's power to give love to this stranger.

Miss Prue was so fully occupied with the fresh turn events had taken, and so worried by small immediate cares, that she could not fence with Margaret Lascelles. A little more languid talk, and she rose, Fayette gladly taking the signal of departure. Margaret Lascelles, imagining that the young girl was to be impressed by flattering words, lavished fond epithets upon her.

"We shall meet again to-morrow, my dearest love, light of my eyes," she murmured, "not to part again, I hope. I will not say good-bye. Think of me, dream of me, as I shall of you, darling, mignonnette, sweet one."

Miss Prue sniffed, standing in an ostentatious waiting attitude by the door, while Margaret cooed, and simpered, and smiled, and tried every affected little art to re-kindle the dead ashes of Fayette's enthusiasm.

"I wouldn't mind the trouble of strangling that woman in the least," Miss Prue snarled to herself, "if the law would only sanction my really meritorious action. What will this poor child's fate be, under control of such a—bah, I can't find a suitable name for her. I wouldn't insult a respectable snake in the grass by naming him in the same breath with her."

Margaret caught the cold grey eye of Prue Ibbotson fixed upon her, and, surprised for a moment, recoiled. Fayette took the opportunity of escaping, and almost ran to the door.

"Good-day," said Miss Ibbotson, with a jerky nod.

She felt thoroughly dissatisfied; she had an instinctive sense that something was wrong; but unforeseen events had crowded so rapidly upon her during the last few days that her ordinary cold, just judgment and powers of reasoning had become confused.

Margaret Lascelles murmured some indistinct words of farewell. Fayette smiled as pleasantly as her sinking heart would admit, and gently closed the door, following Aunt Prue, who had noisily stumped down the dark, old-fashioned staircase, never pausing until she had gained the open air.

Then the two slowly walked, side by side, out from the shade of the old inn and its cool, embowering trees into the sultry glare of the summer sunshine. Neither spoke much, neither dared to dwell upon the painful fact that this was the last time, in all human probability, they should ever walk through this old familiar way together. Miss Prue felt irritable, ready to quarrel with anybody, except Fayette. She found it hard to keep back the strange tears, which would persist in welling up in her hard grey eyes.

"Fayette, child," she suddenly broke out, as they were near the gates of The Sycamores, "we must not be cowardly. Perhaps—we must not forget that, if what they say be true, Beattie is rich, a great lady—she will be able to help you, if you should need help. I may be away, but I shall hope to have letters from you, my dear. And things may not be quite so bad as we fear."

There was much excitement and various preparations for change at The Sycamores. Patsy Brown was discontented, though outwardly resigned.

"It ain't for the likes of us to grumble when our betters is satisfied," she said severely to Phoebe. "We shall get used to change by-and-bye."

But she was horrified when she heard that Fayette was going away—"for ever"—the next

day. She could not credit the evil tidings, although she was obliged to help in some hasty packing. By some curious touch, her evident anguish of mind affected Fayette more than all beside. But Patsy did not lose all presence of mind, in spite of her tearful grief.

"You won't forget poor old Patsy?" said she. "If you want any help, you write to me, if so be nobody else is near, and I'll help you all I can. Miss Beattie's a fine young lady now, and she'll be a friend. You'll excuse my talking to you so free-like, honey, won't you? I've acknowledged you from the time you was a little mite like, and all your little troubles—thank goodness they never was much—so, lovey, I feel I has a right to talk. What a shame it is Miss Beattie should have so much, and you nothing. Not that I grudges nothing to her, I'm sure."

As in a dream, Fayette passed through the day. The old home, the old rest, were vanishing. What would the new life bring? No brightness shone upon the path opening before her; it was with shuddering dislike that she looked to the days to come. Aunt Prue watched her anxiously. Poor old Patsy watched her even more closely, though Fayette was not conscious of this fond espionage.

"Don't I wish I was a handsome young prince for her sake," sighed Patsy, looking secretly through her flower-seamed kitchen window at the young girl petting the pigeons in the soft mystical twilight. "I used to hate the young men, but now I'd jump for joy if I seed a decent young fellow walk in at that there gate, and for him to fall on one knee, gracefully and say, 'I loves you to that extent, my queen, as I can't find no words for to tell you, like, and will you marry me, and be my dear little wife, and I'll protect and take care of you, and nobody shan't worry you, and I've got heaps and heaps of money, being independent like, and we'll fly away in a gold coach, where nobody can't torment and bother us, and—But's where's the good of being silly?" Patsy pulled herself up with a start. "Young men don't seem so plenty, somehow, as they used to be when I was young, and used to fancy I'd have my pick and choice. And even then," she concluded, with a sigh, "I never seed nor heard of no good-looking young princes being about."

But honest, short-sighted Patsy did not know that her darling's prince was not so far away as she imagined. However, even in the old fairy tales, nobody inside the story even seems to know what is going to happen. And very often we grumble at our happiest fortune because it comes to us with an ugly face and ungracious manner.

A dull street near the Foundling Hospital, where the tall, prison-like houses stand stolidly on either side, and stare at each other with cold, unneighbourly eyes. The strip of sky above is leaden in hue; sometimes the sun tries to pierce through, to beat with sullen fury on the dry, dusty pavement.

The dulllest of the dull houses was occupied by a little, fat, frowny-looking Frenchwoman, who managed to pay her rent by letting off every part of her habitation except the back kitchen. And one of her lodgers had, for some time, been Mrs. Lascelles.

Mrs. Lascelles had been away for a short time in the country, detained, she wrote to Madam Vey, by an accidental sprain. But she had returned bringing with her a beautiful young girl—her daughter, she told madam.

Madam grunted the day of her return. Madam was a vulgar old body, a disgraceful sloven up to about four or five o'clock in the afternoon, and a caricature of the pictures in "Le Follet" for the rest of the day and evening. Then madam looked out of the corner of her eye, like a good-natured kind of old parrot or cockatoo, at Fayette, and said, "Oh, ah—hum" which might mean anything or nothing. Margaret Lascelles snarled slightly, and yawned.

Fayette stood like one in a dream. Then



[BREAKING THE NEWS.]

madam screamed like an irritated old cockatoo, and walked downstairs, when a fat, slovenly maid marched up, evidently in answer to the scream, and nodded cavalierly to Mrs. Lascelles, staring "with all her eyes" at Fayette.

"We are very tired, Elizabeth," said Margaret Lascelles to this girl in her sweetest tone. "Please, is my room ready?"

"Yes 'm," said Elizabeth, unable to take her gaze away from Fayette. Some faint gleam of sympathy between this girl and herself made Fayette smile, and this little flickering smile made Elizabeth Fayette's bond slave for ever. Elizabeth had the foolish feminine longing for friendship and sympathy, the fond girlish love of beauty and finery, and this fair angelic stranger appeared like a vision of loveliness and light, so took her heart by storm. "Quite ready, 'm," she went on, still looking at Fayette. "And if you like I'll get you some tea in half a minute."

"Thank you, Elizabeth, said Margaret Lascelles, as if surprised at such civility. "If madam does not mind—"

"Oh, lor, mem, no—she won't mind for onst. I'll bring it directly," said Elizabeth, smiling at Fayette, and then running downstairs.

Margaret Lascelles led the way upstairs to the back room on the second floor, Fayette slowly following. The boxes and packages were left in the narrow passage until Elizabeth could find time to carry them up.

"It is a poor place to welcome my darling to," said Margaret Lascelles, as she threw the door open. "But I hope we shall not be long here."

Fayette followed her into the room, much as a condemned prisoner might follow a civil gaoler into a cell. But with a girl's curiosity she glanced round. It was a bedroom and sitting-room combined, not very neat, but meagrely furnished, but if there was nothing to admire neither was there much to condemn.

"I have taken a room for you upstairs, my dearest," said Margaret Lascelles quickly, noticing the look on Fayette's face, which

betrayed her most secret feelings. "Of course this one room would be too small for you and me."

Before Fayette could reply someone rapped at the door, and in answer to Margaret Lascelles' voice, Elizabeth came in with a teatray.

While the girl was arranging the table Margaret Lascelles went to the tiny dressing-table, and flung off her bonnet and cloak with nervous impatience.

"What a pity it is I can't play my game without this stupid dummy—this daughter of mine," she whispered to her image in the glass, an expression of diabolical fury contracting her handsome features. "I hope it will soon be over. She puts me in a fever, with that perpetual simpering wax-doll face of hers. If she would only get in a temper, once in a way, I think I could endure it better."

Elizabeth having stared again at Fayette with irrepressible curiosity, went away. Fayette took off her hat, tried to smooth back her rebellious waves of hair, and to quell her murmuring heart, and then sat down at the sparsely-laid table.

It was impossible to keep up any attempt at conversation. The thoughts of each rambled far away. Fatigue made a good excuse for silence, and both were thankful when it was time to part for the night.

Margaret Lascelles affected to linger over her good-night. This girl puzzled her. Tears, reproaches, sulkiness, she could have met; but this calm resigned silence, this sweet patience, she could not comprehend.

"Good-night, my darling, my love," she murmured. "Soon we will leave this prison, this poor cage, and you shall reign a little queen."

A little dingy room at the top of the house had been assigned to Fayette. This first night she thankfully crept up, guided by Elizabeth, and shut herself in, hoping to forget her painful thoughts and fears in sleep. But instead of going quietly to sleep she sat by the window for two hours, watching the silent stars, her mind

in vain seeking to pierce the mysterious future which had so suddenly opened before her.

"Why do I feel so frightened?" she asked herself. "Why do I dread this mother for whom I have longed all the years of my life? She is so kind, she tries to win my love—she speaks to me so softly, so gently. Am I ungrateful? I cannot love or even like her. What would I not give—if I had anything to give—to be back at The Sycamores."

And the remembrance of the old quiet, serene days, which she had never found wearisome, although the impetuous Beattie had so often rebelled against their tame monotony, brought bitter tears. But the tears relieved her, and she slept peacefully until the hot, glaring light of the morning awakened her.

From her grimy little window she could see nothing but dingy roofs and tall chimneys. To one fresh from the country, from so pleasant a home as The Sycamores, the air was redolent of dust and smoke. With a despairing shudder, the young girl drew back, and went down to her mother's room, with a brave resolve to be cheerful.

On the way down she met Elizabeth, laden with a tray. The evening before this young person had not appeared to much advantage, but in the fresh morning light, as it straggled through the smudgy panes of glass on the narrow landing, she looked like some gnome newly come from its hiding-place, or running home. Elizabeth grinned good-humouredly, and Fayette felt as if she had found some kind of friend.

"Mrs. Lascelles ain't hup, I don't think," said Elizabeth. "She don't hardly ever get hup afore eleven or twelve. I'm a-goin' to take her her breakfus, and p'rhaps you'd better go hin."

The girl knocked at the door with her foot, both hands being occupied with the tray. A sleepy voice said "Come in," so Elizabeth pushed open the door without farther ceremony. Fayette followed reluctantly.

(To be Continued.)



[A STAGE ASPIRANT.]

THE TEMPTER'S THRALL. (A COMPLETE STORY.)

CHAPTER I.

BEFORE THE FOOTLIGHTS.

THERE are many dens and dungeons for the poor of London which are called "lodging-houses" where Heaven's light scarcely ever seems to shine, and dim eyes long vainly for a glimpse of the green fields and flowers that belong to childhood's memories.

There are fewer drearier dens than those to be found in a block of hideous brickwork called "Boneham's Buildings," and few sadder sights than to see a beautiful woman dying slowly for want of food in one of their grim compartments. The window is broken; the mattress on which she is lying seems a mere heap of rags. An old crone sits by the wooden table on the one chair the apartment contains, and a young girl is sobbing by the hearth near the sparse embers of the smouldering fire.

"You might find summat better to do than fret, Estella," the old woman says, drinking the remains of some cold tea out of a broken cup. "P'raps 'tis the want o' sleep makes you low to-day."

The girl clasps her hands and rises to her feet. She has the black, lustreless hair and eyes of the South, the slender, yielding grace and delicate contours of extreme youth. Life has begun hard for her in Boneham's Buildings, but where will it end? She first saw daylight in a workhouse, and will the eternal shadows of the endless night come to her in a hospital?

"If I could only get some money," she cries, breathlessly, and glancing at the white face on the dreadful grimy pillow. "I pray night and day for it, and nothing cares or heeds me."

The black dreamy eyes, so tender, so spaniel-like in their expression, open wider as a restless sigh comes from the invalid, but the old woman

who goes by the name in Boneham's Buildings of Aunt Betsy laughs as she draws a bottle from her pocket containing something very different from that yellow tea she last swallowed—something that is called "white satin" in Boneham's Buildings.

"Why do you laugh?" Estella asks, as if frightened at the grotesque mirth and the sudden wide opening of those toothless jaws.

"Wot did the cards tell ye, yer young idiot?" she cries, inspired anew by the gin. "'Tis the truth, believe me. A dark gentleman will love ye—nay, dunno start, 'tis the truth, and a fair man will take you from Boneham's, and diamonds will flash in yer hair, and then ye must needs blub and spile yer eyes. 'Ave a drop o' gin, lovie, and cheer up."

"But will all this save her?" Estella asks, staring startled at the prophecies of this grim Cassandra.

"A swell in the Guards, lovie—a dark man. Think of it, and you as come out o' the 'ouse."

Mrs. Betsy Cheeseman grins anew and rocks herself to and fro as if the idea were altogether too much for her, and then her old head drops in her hands and she falls into a semi-doze.

"Mother darling," Estella whispers, bending over the sufferer, "you are out of pain now, are you not, and better and easier?"

"If you could only get some ice to cool my brain," the weak voice murmurs, in a refined and educated voice.

The speaker is a lady; anyone can see that. Aunt Betsy's old beaded purse is on the table, and Estella in her agony handles it irresolutely. She herself feels half famished. The room swims round and round; fire flashes from her eyes. Must she steal to get the ice for her dying mother?

At that moment the door opens suddenly, and someone sweeps into the room, who seems like a being from another world. A very young and lovely woman, barely twenty, in an azure-hued satin dress, the train of which she lifts with a wry face from the dirty floor. Estella drops the

purse. Aunt Betsy opens one eye, and then the other, as the visitor brings her white ringed hand heavily down on the old woman's shoulder.

"Lord a mussy, Lizzie, is it you?" cries Aunt Betsy, trying to rise, and tumbling into the grate instead.

"What a lively kennel you're in, mother," the visitor cries, not noticing Estella, and shaking out the laces of her three-guinea parasol.

"'Tis the best you and Providence think fit to give me, dearie."

Estella is absorbed in the loveliness of the brilliant picture. The chestnut hair is dressed in a thousand curls that seem to kiss the whitest brow in the world. Large wistful eyes, with the look of the street arab and an intelligent sheep mixed mysteriously together, rest on Estella, who feels timid and pained in this magnificent presence. She sees here the power of money—cruel, powerful, senseless, soulless gold—and she wants a few shillings to save her mother's life. Suddenly, to the intense surprise of Aunt Betsy, the girl throws herself on her knees and clasps her hands.

"Do you not see she dies there?" she murmurs, in a hoarse, terrible voice. "Oh, give me a few shillings to save her life, what can it matter to you who are so rich? I never begged before, madam, never—never. I've gone out of a night and sung in the squares, and I've sold cresses from house to house, and I've never begged; but nothing hears me now—nothing cares. Oh, help me to save her life."

"A scene fit for the stage," mutters Castalia—she is no longer Lizzie Cheeseman of the New Cut, nourished on red herrings and porter—but Mademoiselle Claire de Lune, of the Anteros Theatre. "What a bore," she cries, shrugging her lovely shoulders, all a glitter with the beaded lace and fringe of her fashionable dolman.

Estella's eyes flash anew.

"Is that all you have to say to me? Is that the extent of your pity—the depth of your heart?"

"Mother, does this young gipsy perpetually rave like this, and go in for the Comedie Francaise business?"

"'Tis a pity she loses her senses so," says Aunt Betsy, looking about for her purse and her pipe; "but there's death behind us, Lizzie."

The lovely Castalia does not enjoy this allusion to that shadow "cloaked from head to foot."

"What a bore," she repeats, peevishly, but turning pale. She is supposed to utter this classic phrase on the stage in a manner simply bewitching.

Death! She would rather not think of it, her life is so successful.

"Shall I catch a fever, then, or anything dreadful?" Miss Claire de Lunenext asks, with a shiver.

"Oh, no, my Lis; there's only starvation here, and 'tis not likely you'll catch that—is it?"

She who gives forty guineas a year to a French cook and thirty for a set of sables certainly considers it improbable.

"Why don't you earn money, you're handsome enough?" she says, suddenly turning to Estella, and opening her mother's—pearl purse.

"How can I earn anything?" the girl cries, glancing down at her old ragged dress. "I would give half my life away to make my darling better."

"Never give anything away on principle," answers the actress, "not even love, or you'll rue it. Here are three sovereigns, go and buy what you need, while I chat with mother. Get a cheap gown, wash your face, tidy your hair, and come down to the theatre late this afternoon. I'll speak a word for you to the manager: you can get into the ballet."

The ballet! Estella has some idea it means dancing in short frocks, but she shrinks from nothing that is honest and which will give her money.

"How much should I be paid?" she asks, in a trembling voice.

"Paid," laughs Castalia, screwing up her rosy lips, preternaturally healthy some might think in the morning light in their ripe hue, "not enough to keep you in boots, my girl; but there's your chances as don't count."

"My chances?"

"The dark gentleman as 'all love you," cries old Aunt Betsy, jerking her thumb over her shoulder. "'Tis him she means like enough."

"I stood out and got my price," Castalia continues, fastening on her ten-buttoned gloves; "many fellows made generous offers but they weren't good enough. 'Marriage or nothing,' says I; I knew what my looks were worth, and it's a poor creature that sells herself at a loss; and Bob—that's my husband—went away in a rage, but he came back, I knew he would, because he was young and spoony—and now I'm his lawful wife, and the mother of three as fine children as ever you wish to see."

It is a new revelation of life to Estella. She never reflects that it is these cold, sordid, vulgar natures that get everything, while noble ones like her mother die in silence on a bed of rage, but then she has a good deal to learn of the ways of this world, and, above all, of its women. She slips now hurriedly away to buy fruit, jelly, and wine for her mother, and a cheap new dress for herself.

"After all she is very kind to me," the girl thinks gratefully, as she makes her purchases. "But it all comes too late, a month ago it might have saved her, but now—"

This is a trick Fate is fond of playing us. The "might have been" and the "too late" are ever ringing in our ears; they form the minor key of all earth's harmonies—they are like the Eumenides in a Greek chorus.

Estella's mother had been a young orphan girl who eloped with a Spaniard, and who had deserted her two years after marriage; since then constant sickness and ill-health had brought her down to the level of Boneham's Buildings.

Friends and relations they had none. Estella had once earned a little by fur-sewing

in a large establishment in Fleet Street, but was sent away through the jealousy of one of the women employed there. Then they tried dress-making, and that also failed. They were unlucky; nothing prospered with them.

After Madame Calvados has fallen into a light sleep from the medicines and nourishment Estella brings the girl leaves her in charge of Aunt Betsy, dresses herself in her new clean dress, and goes down to the theatre. The actualities of life have pressed too hard upon her to leave room for any superfluous sentiment, and the group of loudly-dressed, coarse-looking men standing laughing before the theatre entrance gives her no misgiving. But as she enters a small room to the right, where the manager is sitting, she finds her heart beating nervously. Her engagement rests with him.

"Sit down a minute," he says, not unkindly. "I want to speak to Lord Conway, who has just driven up in his brougham."

Estella obeys, and takes stock of that inner sanctuary of refinement—a manager's room at the "Anteros." The portraits are numerous. Young women in short skirts, some representing various specimens of birds, others fish, and others insects, startle her with the eccentricity of their costumes; others in tulle and tulle, also shine in gaudy glittering costume.

None can touch her in respect of beauty, but she does not know this. They all look so happy, she thinks, and wonders if their hearts can have ever ached like hers. And this—surely this woman in the velvet and pearls, holding a rose against her breast, is Castalia? Those long-lashed, smiling, street-arab eyes are hers?

She gasses no longer as the manager and a gentleman are returning. It is Lord Conway, she is sure, by the fawning civility of the other's manner. They both enter and stare at her as if she were some new specimen of a prize animal on view.

"Can you dance?" the manager asks, going to his desk, and looking over some papers, "because if you can't it's no use coming here."

"I could learn," she answers, smiling a little but feeling hopeless.

"Ah, but d'ye like it? Will you take to the stage as some of our young 'uns do here, like ducks to water? Give 'em a shove, a pinch, a blow, or a smile, and they know what you mean and play better parts after a while."

The tears come into her eager eyes. "Blow feeling," says the manager. That won't pay here, miss."

Lord Conway has not yet spoken, but he is watching the silent appeal, the pathetic bewilderment, of the loveliest face he has ever seen.

"Give her a trial, my good Max," he says, slowly. "She's got the limbs of a Sylph, and the smile of a Sybil—beauty that ought to be the talk of the town. Why, her photos alone—"

His lordship here takes out a long cigar, lights it, and continues:

"Her photos alone would make her interesting. You've plenty of the rosy, saucy, strawberry and cream sort here, and their arms are rough, and their accents execrable. But a pale, dark beauty, a brunette with the grace of an Atalanta; above all, who's not vulgar—why, I think, Max, she'd about draw in time."

"We must lick her into shape first, my lord. I'm afraid she's no bounce about her."

"Where do you live, my girl?" his lordship asks, abruptly turning to the manager.

"At Boneham's Buildings," Estella answers, a pale flush stealing to her cheek.

"Among a set of thieves and beggars?" mutters Maxwell, sotto voce; "but now I remember Madame Castalia called here and spoke about you. By the way, you'd better stay and see her in the burlesque. We begin in an hour. Go in there," pointing to an inner door, "and sit down. I'll have a glass of ale sent to you."

Lord Conway follows Estella. He is a tall,

bearded man about sixty, very round, very cold and heartless. He limps slightly from an attack of the gout. She does not know that his patronage means fame, that he can "float" an actress, a beauty, a singer, or a company, so that the world at once believes in them, cringes to them, and pays them homage.

She has never before entered a theatre, or pictured the effect of beauty before the footlights. Lord Conway finds her very silent. She will clearly not readily respond to the Tempter's Thrall; but moths eat ermine by degrees, and the world looks like one long fete to the eyes of youth when gold is showered around.

"Of what are you thinking, Estella?" he says, after she has answered some of his questions, "and why do you come out in cotton gloves?"

"Because they are cheap. 'I was wondering,' in a low voice, 'about my mother.' 'Now for a family history,' mutters his lordship, suppressing a yawn.

He was used to hearing domestic twaddle when showing any interest in a feminine creature.

"More likely her lover," is his reflection. "What hypocrites women are."

He takes her into his box as the burlesque commences, and Castalia, arrayed as the Queen of a Coral Isle, is just entering. She gives Estella a little nod, and then, amid grotesque buffonery, glides about the stage, maddening men with her beauty.

There must be a fair sprinkling of the "ape" in human nature to make men and women convulsed with laughter at mere antics, and the reason that so many sublime works are failures proves this beyond a doubt. This creature before the footlights in her diamonds and wealth and long rippling chestnut hair dazzles Estella. Is this what she must be to succeed? A great bitterness enters her young soul.

"Mother will die!" a voice keeps repeating. "All comes too late to save her. Why should I care what becomes of me, when Fate left my darling to starve?"

Lord Conway has a succession of ices and vases brought to the box for her to partake of during the half-hour they remain there. He drives her home to the corner of the street where Boneham's Buildings rears its ugly head, squeezes her hand, and looks at her in a way that brings an odd terrifying surprise to Estella. Her eyes, innocent as Heaven's pure light, haunt him for about half-an-hour, when he returns to the theatre and orders a small bottle of brandy.

Boneham's Buildings look uglier than ever in the tender glow of the green moonlight; that mystical haze does not relieve its gloom. Aunt Betsy is still dozing by the fire as Estella enters, and with a cry of joy the girl runs to the bedside, for she sees her mother smiling at her.

"Oh, darling, you are better!" she cries, kissing her softly on the mouth; "and all will be changed soon. I see how blessed are the fruits of gold."

She has saved her mother's life by force of that wild entropy at the feet of a rich woman.

"The cards spoke the truth, love," the old woman mutters by the hearth, "and my Liz will keep her word. The fair gentleman will put diamonds in yer 'air, and give yer the desire of yer 'eart."

Although Estella is overjoyed and exalted at the improvement in her mother's condition, there is the same strange bitterness, even sterner in her expression as came over it at the theatre—a sort of contemptuous self-loathing.

"Must I sink as others, and be as they are?" she mutters, while ever and anon comes the half-drunken soliloquy of Aunt Betsy by the fire like a voice in a dream.

"The fair gentleman with the diamonds, and the dark one as you'll love, dearie."

CHAPTER II.

IN HER RIGHT MIND.

AFTER a few months are over, when Estella

studies hard and goes through the necessary drudgery of her profession, the world begins to talk of the success of a new beauty. She is very haughty, very cold and silent, but nevertheless everyone tells her she is wise in her generation; she is in her right mind.

She is so nervously sensitive that she could not have faced and fought the world alone, and singlehanded, and her bitter experience of life has now made her prefer reality to shadows. The money came too late to save her mother's life. She is sitting in her luxurious boudoir in deep thought, dwelling on a project that has long filled her mind. Her beauty alone fascinates an audience, and wins the appreciation of her genius. She portrays the deep and tender emotions of the love she has never felt with subtle delicacy and force. Poetical drama enchants her, and above all this last piece she has played exercises singular fascination over her soul.

"It is time, madam, for you to dress," her maid remarks, bringing her in a tiny cup of tea on a silver tray.

Who was it last night who muttered a few words which she caught as she stepped into her brougham—words that will not leave her memory?

"That woman is a grand creature, and plays superbly, but the best portion of her soul is dead."

Had that passer-by really spoken the truth? She glances carelessly at the magnificent robes laid on the satin coverlet of her bed—a rich brocade velvet embroidered with gold.

"When shall I really feel what I act?" sighs Estella.

She is getting wearied of flattery. She longs for the love that is a consecration. As she finishes her toilette, and is clasping a diamond bracelet round her wrist, Lord Conway enters and watches her for a few moments in silence. In some ways he has never completely mastered her. His thralldom has its limits; it is still a free, wild, defiant spirit that looks out at him now from dreamy, brilliant eyes.

"You will be late, Estella," Lord Conway says, glancing at his watch.

"Never mind, it will be for the last time," she answers, dreamily.

Her manner has so completely changed, he stares at her in amazement. Her hand which he touches is icy cold.

"Are you ill?" he asks, gently. "Overtired, perhaps, and weary of being the most famous woman of the day."

"You and I, my lord, must part," Estella says, rising from her velvet chair; "and I have resolved to leave the stage."

He starts, and then sneers snakily:

"Is this love?" he asks, eyeing her gravely under his dark lashes.

She sighs restlessly.

"No, but there is dishonour in our lives that stifles me. I wish to go away for a time—to leave London, to live alone and forget."

"You will soon tire of your living grave. As for me, I have long ceased to be surprised at anything where women are concerned."

"But I am not ungrateful. You brought me from darkness into the light of popularity and fame. I am rich, thanks alone to you," she says, hurriedly.

He had developed her art gifts, and in his way he had been kind.

"Well, this is, I suppose, a woman's caprice," Lord Conway says, glancing at the languid listlessness of her expression.

"I was but a child, and ignorant and wretched when we first met," she cries, passionately. "Oh, if you knew how that fierce light blinds me, and how I long for the calmness and the shade and the peace of some still retreat."

"Is it mere caprice?" he wonders.

He is a very practical man, and he believes she has some end in view of which he is ignorant.

"And you will take back all your presents," she says, in a low, constrained voice.

Lord Conway has never been so surprised in his life, but he contents himself with shrugging his shoulders.

"Since you wish it," he answers, looking at those dark, glowing eyes that have so often beguiled him.

What can it mean? Is it idiocy, caprice, or love? Has she imbibed some deadly, mental poison that has cast a temporary stupor over her senses?

"I want to have time to think when I am alone," she says, softly, touching a magnificent bouquet he has brought her.

Lord Conway leans heavily over her high-backed chair, he rests one hand on her jewelled arm and with the other he draws the crimson rose from the sable masses of her hair.

"You have spoken plainly to-night, Estella, and I am a man of the world who knows how to take these matters very quietly. I have long seen a change in you, but I am glad it will not break my heart—since we must say farewell."

"You know that I am not quite like others," she says, pleadingly.

He kisses her once with sudden passion, he fears that at the last she will escape the tempter's thrall.

"It was that which made you adorable; your sweetness, your patience, your gratitude. Yes, I am sorry to lose you, child."

"But it must be."

"I believe you are going mad," he answers, finding all his arguments powerless to induce her to change her mind.

They drive in silence to the theatre, but she starts as from a dream when she is before the audience. A new and almost terrible emotion possesses her; she holds them breathless in the last scene. She gives greater grandeur, dignity, and passion to her part than ever. The strangeness and the suffering of her mood communicates itself, by some marvellous electricity, to the people—women weep, and men are moved.

Lord Conway, watching her intently from his box, alone feels bored. That intensity, that fervour are not played for him. He has inspired her with no such exalted flights, for she is about to leave him. What is awaking in this nature he has never understood. Can it be love, and, if so, for whom?

She is fearfully exhausted when all is over; she has been recalled again and again and applauded till the roof rings. Tears are in her eyes as the curtain falls—it is the last time. An influence stronger than herself is calling her away from this scene of her many triumphs.

Lord Conway may be right—she is going mad, or, may be, there is a fever in her veins which will end in death.

"And to-morrow peace," the girl cries, burying her face in her hands, as she is driven home rapidly in the darkness. "I have done with the old life. I feel the same as some world-weary wanderer seeking the repose of the convent walls."

And she sobs with the same convulsive force as when her mother lay dying on the bed of rags and nothing had seemed to care. There are truer, purer depths in her heart than she is aware of.

Lord Conway believes that Estella's morbid resolve to retire from the stage at the greatest moment of her success is the forerunner of melancholy or decline. He meets the charming Castalia as she is leaving the theatre and tells her his fears.

"Quite too dreadfully absurd," the merry little woman says. "When you've made her the fashion, too; but leave her alone for a while, and when we find out her retreat we'll visit her unexpectedly, and talk to her and make her glad enough to return—these clever people are all half crazy at times."

As Estella enters her drawing-room, wearing the same dress in which she played her greatest part, Lord Conway rises from his chair, throws aside his cigarette, and approaches her. The shadows of the flickering firelight play upon the jewels in her hair and about her throat, but her eyes are still wet with tears and gleam on him like stars.

"You have surpassed yourself to-night, Estella. You have indeed the divine and sacred

fire," he whispers, amazed at the revelation of her artistic powers.

Her musing, thoughtful eyes are lifted to his, and the diamonds in her glistening hair fall at his feet.

"Solitude will give me sweeter inspirations," she says, gently. "The man who wrote the piece I played to-night understands what hideous lethargy—what false mockery, such lives as I and others lead must be to some women; his writing has terrified and aroused me."

"I had no idea Frank Herbert ever had the electrifying effect of a St. Paul," Lord Conway answers, still staring doubtfully at her.

"Did Frank Herbert write the drama?"

"He did; the man's quite a character, too, in his way."

Lord Conway never judges anyone or anything from outward appearances only—he holds her hand almost tenderly in this strange farewell.

"You have made no pretence of affection for me," he says, rising to leave her; "but a change has of late come over you which I do not understand. You are a rare and wonderful creature, I admit, and you will one day love—take care you don't make a shipwreck of the future."

He is sorry to lose her, there has been something ever cold, grand, and lofty in a nature indifferent to flattery, careless of gain; he has seen so much beauty which is but the disguise of inner villainess.

"What has changed me?" Estella murmurs, wearily, later on, in the silence of her bed-chamber, taking down the thick coils of her hair. "Am I already under the spell—fascinated by a voice, ruled by a shadow?"

CHAPTER III.

AT THE FARMHOUSE.

It is a lovely summer morning, with the July wind blowing scented blossoms about the orchard paths. It is a new life for Estella—a silent, beautiful, restful existence—passed amid foliage, and bud, and blossom. The world regretted her, but soon hastened to pay homage to a new favourite. No one is ever missed for long—a rival is ever ready to fill up the place of the departed.

Presently she saunters back to the farmhouse where she is staying. She finds it all astir. Molly, the good-natured dairymaid, looks pale and frightened as Estella asks the cause of the commotion.

"An accident, ma'am, has happened to one of Lord Severn's visitors," the girl explains, "the gentleman was thrown from his horse."

Estella passes on, softly opens the door, and sees a tall, broad-chested man, white as a piece of sculpture, lying senseless on the couch. A bruise, swollen and blackened, is on his temples, and his hands hang lifelessly by his side.

She kneels down and passes her hand gently over his brow. It is a grand, imperial head, one fit to be a king's, classic as a Roman hero's. Suddenly his eyes open and rest on the face bending over him. None could recognise Estella as the famous actress of the past season. She wears her hair pushed back from her face, and her white cashmere robe seems to increase her natural pallor.

"He will live," the doctor says, as a few spoonfuls of brandy are slowly swallowed, "but he must not be moved. Lord Severn must be told that were he disturbed it would be at the risk of his life. It will be better now to leave him in quietness."

They all withdraw save Estella, who remains unnoticed in a distant corner. It seems cruel for none to watch him in his helplessness. After a few minutes he speaks, in hoarse, struggling accents:

"Well, am I to live. This agony is more than can be borne. What verdict, doctor, do you pronounce?"

She recognises the voice at once, spite of the change pain has wrought in it. This is the same

man who said the best part of her soul was dead.

"Is there anyone you would like to see, or is there anything I can do for you?" she asks, timidly.

His eyes again open, and he sees a woman beautiful as a painter's dream.

"Tell me what my doom must be," he mutters.

"You will live if you are quiet," she says, soothingly. "I will tell the doctor you would like to see him. He fancied you would sleep."

"Sleep," he groans, "when every limb and nerve seems racked with intolerable agony. Tell him Colonel Herbert implores an opiate, or brandy, or death."

Colonel Herbert! Estella draws her breath hard. Can it be Frank Herbert, the author of the famous drama? A sudden awe of him possesses her, and she glides away to summon the doctor as he desired.

Colonel Herbert recovers by degrees. He is interested in Estella, but he feels there is something mysterious about her. She is particularly reserved in everything relating to herself, but he is poet enough to believe that perhaps some great sorrow or blight has sent her into exile.

He remains some months in the neighbourhood, and they are now on terms of intimacy. It is not unusual for Colonel Herbert to overtake her in her walks. One day he picks up his own drama with some withered lilies in one of the pages. Estella is sitting out in the little garden, and he is by her side.

"You like this drama?" he asks, indifferently. "Have you ever seen it acted?"

A deep flush spreads itself over her cheek, for his eyes are on her. She laughs, and shakes her head.

"Of course you know I wrote that piece," he says, carelessly, picking up the fallen lilies.

"Yes, I know."

After this silence comes between them, in which new thoughts burn and live. Is he beginning to love this strange, silent, reticent girl who seems hardly of the earth? But what does he know of her or her life? His eyes are softer as they seek hers. These last few weeks, passed more or less in her presence, have taught him that he does care for her more than is well for his peace.

Estella acknowledges him silently her idol; all her reverence, her worship, her homage are his. He has avowed a soul that only lives to adore its master. His words ever steal on the senses, with wild delight, even if love is not uttered.

But to-day there is a change—his hand trembles as it seeks hers. He forgets her reticence, the mystery that enfolds her, he will ask her for her confidence by-and-by—now he only craves her love. His touch thrills her, she is entranced, bewildered; the divine and sacred fire of her genius is overwhelmed by a mightier flame.

"Estella, do you not know what brings me so often here?" he asks, and is conscious at that moment of his power over her, by the love-light in her happy eyes. "It is you, my darling," he goes on, rapidly. "You are like the ideal I have cherished and created—you are like 'Cynthia,' when she laid down her life for love. Could you care thus for a man, or are you but a beautiful statue?"

Her breast heaves, her eyes half close, her head sinks in her hands, and she bursts into tears. Can he not read her worship in every trembling sigh?

"I am no statue," she answers, as he draws her to his breast, and feels the warmth of her young lips, and caresses the heavy tresses that fall around her like an inky stream. "I am a woman."

"Let us live for each other, dearest," he cries, rapturously, folding her in his arms and hearing the quick beats of her heart. "You seem to give me back the joys of my lost youth."

"Oh! my love, my love!" she murmurs, awaking to new life in his embrace.

For an instant she longs to confess all—to throw herself at his feet and say:

"I am she who played your drama—whom you changed, re-animated, aroused. Have pity on me in spite of the past, or kill me if the dream must end in sorrow."

She forgets the past can never cease to be a danger—that deeds can never die. And Colonel Herbert is content to live for the present in the joy of being loved. He dreads any rough awakening from a trance sweeter than any he has known before; the romance which is the very breath of his being delights in the seclusion, the tenderness, the all-sufficing glow of love. How can so divine a creature be anything but perfect?

"Do you not think I understand 'Cynthia'?" asks Estella, with a restless movement, and taking up the book. "Can I not dream as she did, have noble thoughts, and be as true?"

And then she repeated, in a low, passionate voice:

"Ah, love, would we had never met,
Such cruel fates had ne'er been ours;
For me a life of wild regret,
For thee a path beset with flowers."

"There must be no regrets for us, beloved?" he murmurs, listening awe-stricken and enchanted at the silvery utterance of the rich, trained voice. "Earth will soon be paradise for us both."

CHAPTER IV.

"YOU MUST COME BACK TO US."

AUTUMN has come and heavy showers of rain have destroyed all hopes of a fine harvest. Two persons are crossing the sodden fields this morning—one a woman dressed in the extreme of the fashion, gathering her tight skirts tighter than ever around her to avoid contact with the wet corn; and the other a man with a rather music-hall cut about him: they are Castalia, queen of burlesque, and Matthew Maxwell, manager of the Anteros Theatre.

Estella has no idea that these people, so closely connected with her past life, are so near her again. She is so happy that she is singing low under her breath, when she starts at the sudden approach of footsteps.

Visitors! Who ever comes to the farmhouse, above all, at so early an hour? She gives one glance at the little windows of the room where Colonel Herbert had last kissed and blessed her, as a prisoner on the scaffold might look over the sea of heads towards one sweet spot where is sunlight.

"They have come for me," falls from her white lips, and the roses she has gathered drop at her feet, but she does not move a step nearer the visitors, who have come to draw her into their toils.

"You don't seem particular pleased to see us, Estella," Castalia cries, simpering, advancing over the grass and holding out her hand, "does she, Max? and we've taken all this long journey, too, and dragged ourselves through horrid fields and ditches and places. I call that ungrateful. Ugh! What a quite too dreadfully gloomy old place this is, it would give anyone the miseries."

Estella stands before them like an image of death.

"Why did you come to me?" she asks, hoarsely, a deep red flush slowly mounting to her brow, almost painful after her previous pallor.

"Why did we come for you, my dear?" the manager asks, tilting his hat on one side, "because we're very fond indeed of you, and you mustn't be allowed to mope your life away here. You're doing yourself and us a great injustice."

"Yes, and we want some refreshment, too," cries Castalia, peevishly. "Devonshire clotted cream and junkets and wine, and all the rest of it; and we don't want no tragic acting just at present, do we, Max? That'll keep."

The sound of a horse's hoofs breaks on the stillness. Estella covers her face with her hands, powerless to resist, reckless with misery.

They were to have been married soon, she and Frank; and he would have taken her abroad, and after long years if he had learnt she had deceived him the blow might have fallen less heavily.

Ah, well, it could never be now—the steel-trap is closing around her, the past is not dead; it has the power to sting, to torture and betray.

"Good gracious, child, what is the matter?" Castalia asks, terrified at her expression, while Maxwell makes a slight grimace, and bends his cane on the mould of a flower-bed.

All her happiness is marred and spoiled, she will be dragged back from bliss and light and joy. Anything but this—better death a thousand times. Colonel Herbert is coming to them across the grass, he has stood a minute watching them from the porch. The sight of them is not pleasant, he scans them with quick and penetrating survey. Maxwell laughs as he sees him advance; Castalia lowers her train and droops her eyelids.

"By Jove, it's Frank Herbert," he mutters, as the Colonel stands by Estella's side, and thinks that after all Lord Conway was right—it had been love which had sent the greatest actress and the most beautiful woman of the day into solitude and exile.

Colonel Herbert nods coolly to the manager of the Anteros. Estella's intense agitation arrests his attention, for she begins, in spite of her self-control, to tremble, and a sudden faintness seizes her.

"A nice little box you've got here, colonel. Reminds me of those lines of the poet, don't you know, where he talks of the sweetness of solitude, but adds, 'Give me a friend in my retreat, to whom I whisper solitude is sweet.' Ha! ha! Only my joke. No offence," Maxwell says, expansively, sticking his large thumbs in his velvet waistcoat.

"I do not understand you," Colonel Herbert answers, glancing at Estella.

An involuntary cry escapes her.

"Well, we all thought it was a love affair," Maxwell continues, more cautiously; "she was coining gold, literally rolling in it—no mistake about that—when all of a sudden she throws up her profession, for no rhyme nor reason. There was your piece which made a hit, everyone said *Mdlle. Calvados* quite created the part."

Calvados! The colonel turns a face as white as marble on the silent image by his side. She dare not lift her eyes to his; the dear old love will soon change and die now—his scorn and contempt will break her heart, she reads all this in the workings of those sternly-set lips, the flash of the grand grey eyes.

"I—oh! Frank, have mercy; you know the truth at last."

She sways as she speaks and nearly falls.

"You are Calvados. Merciful heavens! Why have you deceived me?"

"And you must come back to us," Castalia here remarks, trying to improve matters. The flame in those burning eyes seems a reproach to her.

"Go into the house," Colonel Herbert says to Estella. "I will speak with you there."

She obeys him without a word. The knife is at her heart, will the end be long in coming? They enter the little room together where he had last kissed her, she who stands before him like a culprit. A sunbeam streams on her through the little stained-glass window.

"Mademoiselle Calvados," he says, in clear, cold accents, "you have done me a great honour—I am glad to be no longer deceived."

She takes a step nearer, and at the flash of his reproachful eyes sinks speechless at his feet.

"That is your trade," he mutters, "but you are not now upon your stage."

"Let me kneel to you," she cries, lifting her hands; "although you shrink from and despise me. I was passive till I learnt your drama. Do you not know that your spirit roused and conquered mine before ever we met—that the burning words you wrote changed me, awed me, thrilled me? I loved you then. I saw you in my

dreams, you haunted my daylight musings. I worshipped you with every breath of my spiritual life."

"And you have deceived me," he says, unclasping the hands that cling to his; but he is not unmoved at her appeal; this passionate soul has been aroused at his call. She, the representative—he, the creator of a great work.

"Have I not dreaded losing you?" she sobs, rising to her feet and shrinking from his reproaches. "I thought that after we were married—years after—when you loved me more, I could trust to your tenderness for forgiveness."

"Estella, I love you madly, and always shall, but your deception is unpardonable. It was not a mere impulse; you have acted a part for months, deliberately and plausibly. Had you confessed the truth earlier, had you owned that you were that famous actress, Estella Calvados, on whose life a dark shadow rested, I should have respected your candour."

He speaks this slowly and distinctly, but she has her arms about his neck, she clings to him with a convulsive force that seems to rend her life.

"It is just," she falters; "only I loved you too well, Frank, to risk losing you or incurring your contempt. I staked my life; but since all is ended between us, let us part in sadness but not in anger. I know that I am not worthy to be your wife."

There is silence for a few moments between them, and then he says, in a low, suppressed voice of intense feeling:

"Return, Estella, to the stage; be again a great actress, develop your powers, live for your art."

"You, whose influence withdrew me from the art I loved, bid me return to it! Well, then I must obey."

She lifts his hand, presses it to her lips. Her grace, her beauty, and sweetness irresistibly attract and charm him. His dark, imperial head bends over hers: he loves her with the love which is still intense, bitter-sweet, all-absorbing.

He had no breath, no being but hers,
She was his voice—he did not speak to her,
But trembled on her words.

And in spite of all he has wounded her to the heart—he, whose writings have roused her dead soul. He knows that her reverence and obedience must be his to eternity; and he cannot part from her unkindly.

"Farewell, Estella," he murmurs, more gently; "remember you have a great future before you; I, as others, do homage to your genius."

He touches her hand, it is icy cold, her heart's blood is frozen. He wishes to rouse her from inaction and despair. Will he ever see her before him with the sunlight on the loosened clusters of her hair? Will he ever feel the clasp of those white soft arms long after the lovely face is banished?

His dreams alone will restore her to him—only his dreams. Then he passes away from her, and Fate still seems to speak to her with the same derision and mockery as when the gold came too late to save her mother's life.

"I have my art still," she thinks, pressing her hands to her brow. "Love has rejected me, but I can pour my pain and passion into art."

She vows to make her life noble, great, and exalted. She will live for others more than for herself; her great sorrow shall teach her penitence and patience. When she rejoins those who bound her in the tempter's thrall and destroyed her happiness, they are amazed at the change in her manner. She never acted more carefully in all her life than now when these cold eyes rest on her. She carries some withered lilies in her hand.

"You asked me to come back to you," she says, steadily and calmly, "and now I am ready."

There is heroism if weakness in her nature—love and pain shall inspire her with greater, truer flights of creative force.

"You see, Maxwell, we were right to come

and fetch her away with us," Castalia says, eyeing her curiously, for how can such a merry butterfly understand the unspeakable agony of Estella's soul?

Years have rolled by, and in the quietude and peace of a little world-forsaken hamlet of Southern France, a woman, beautiful still, but tired and worn, comes to drink in the sweetness and repose of a spring that makes the earth here seem a poet's dream, with its wealth of flowers and odorous perfumes.

Her eyes are languid and Murilla-like in depth and colour; her voice, when she speaks, is like softest music. She has reached the highest pinnacle of fame. She has lived an almost perfect life—helping the poor and needy, comforting the sorrowful, showering blessings on the path of many.

And the long years have not quenched love. The slow, sweet hours that bring us all things good, have brought her nearer to the man who once rejected her—they have at last re-united them, "as the two halves of a single being, inseparable through all eternity." A. C.

VIOLA HARCOURT;

OR,

PLAYING WITH HEARTS.

BY THE AUTHOR OF

"Evander," "Tempting Fortune," etc., etc.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

LORD TARLINGTON SURPRISED.

WHEN well dressed Madam Menzies was a very handsome and showy woman, and there was no doubt that she knew how to dress, having studied the art all her life. With unlimited money at her command she allowed nothing to stand in the way of the gratification of her desires, and such costumiers as Worth of Paris exercised their taste and ingenuity in designing elegant and recherché costumes for her, such as excited the admiration of the men and drove the women wild with envy.

Though time had dealt gently with her, its ravages were to some extent perceptible in her face, but here again she called in art to her aid, and the skill of the enameller eradicated all lines and crow's feet, as the wrinkles under the eyes are called, so that she looked more like a girl of twenty-three than a woman of five-and-forty.

Seeing that the gentlemen with whom they came in contact regarded his wife with admiring eyes, Lord Tarlington began to think that he had not made such a bad bargain after all. That she had been a fortune-teller he was well aware, but he had heard nothing else against her character, and being utterly ignorant of her previous history, he did not scruple to introduce her into the best society.

Being able to converse fluently in French and German, possessing a sweet voice, and having a thorough knowledge of music, her progress in fashionable circles was one prolonged and continuous triumph.

She was much liked and could always fascinate. If she wished to make anyone her friend she would exercise that peculiar magnetic power which she possessed in such a marked degree, and draw them towards her. This was one of the reasons why Lord Tarlington became more attached to her and fond of her society. If he wanted to stay at a club he felt himself compelled, as it were, to go away and seek his home.

While he began to care more for this singular woman day by day, she appeared to think less of him, and when she had him completely at her

feet she behaved, with a levity of conduct which deeply pained him, for she flirted openly with every handsome man she met, and at last she aroused a feeling of jealousy in him, which tormented him to such an extent that it drove him nearly frantic.

If he had been indifferent to her, as he was when he was compelled to marry her, he would not have felt it so keenly; but, as we have said, he was now in love with her, and she cruelly caused him to feel the pangs of unrequited love, giving him to understand, if he complained, that she had wedded him simply for the wealth and the title, combined with the high social position, which being Lady Tarlington gave her.

No one knew who she was, and not one of her former customers, when she was in the fortune-telling business, was able to recognise in the handsome, fashionable, and superbly-dressed peeress the weird and awe-inspiring Madam Menzies, before whom they had bowed their heads in silent wonder as an oracle and seer; who, by her occult art, could read the past and penetrate the future.

There was absolutely no limit to her ambition. Not satisfied with giving the grandest parties in Belgravia, with driving the finest horses, and wearing the most expensive diamonds, she caused herself to be presented at Court, and had the distinguished honour of kissing the hand of her Majesty the Queen at Buckingham Palace.

When she had shone for a time as a bright star of the first magnitude in London, she grew weary, and, like another Alexander, longed for other worlds to conquer. So she changed the scene to Paris, always a favourite place of hers, where she achieved a similar triumph to the one she had celebrated in the sister capital, and her unfortunate husband was driven to the verge of despair by the reckless way in which she lavished her smiles upon fresh admirers.

The one she favoured most was the young Prince de Morny, who was rich, single, and handsome; he resided with his mother, the duchess of that name, at a magnificent mansion a little way out of Paris.

At balls she always kept dances for him. It was he who escorted her to supper, at the opera he never failed to appear in her box, and they were continually driving out together.

Parisians began to notice and comment upon the predilection that the accomplished English peeress showed for the young Frenchman, and though Lord Tarlington remonstrated with her on her conduct, he did so in vain.

All she cared to reply was that they were like brother and sister. If people could not understand pure platonic love that was not her fault. It was very hard she could not have a friend; and, for her part, she would not allow herself to be dictated to by anyone.

In his jealousy Lord Tarlington felt as if he could shoot the prince, but he had no ground for picking a quarrel with him, so he became more kind and devoted to his wife than before, in order to try to make her take more pleasure in his society.

He was like a lap-dog or a spaniel to her, but this did not effect the purpose he had in view. If she was indifferent to him before, she despised him now, and treated him with the contempt which a soft and slavish lover usually receives at the hands of a woman.

While affairs were in this state his brother, the Honourable Fitzharding Sutton, came over to Paris, and had not been long in the gay capital before he heard of the behaviour of his brother's wife, which annoyed him very much, as the name of Tarlington had been too much dragged in the mire of late.

Of course when Viola's confession was made public it was considered that the stain upon the escutcheon of the family had been removed, but here was a fresh scandal, and he spoke his mind freely to his brother about it, advising him, if she refused to make any alteration, to make her an allowance and separate.

The brothers were seated in one of the handsomest drawing-rooms in the Hotel Bristol: her ladyship insisted upon patronising this house

because it was favoured by royalty, the Prince of Wales staying at it among other celebrities. Lady Tarlington was out driving, her husband had asked to be allowed to accompany her, but she had refused, stating that she wished to be alone. He was looking ill and careworn. Instead of being happy, since the return of his property and his undoubted victory over Viola, he had become the most miserable man in existence.

"I can do nothing," said Lord Tarlington, "for the simple reason that I love her. I am a very bond-slave to her; she must have bewitched me, for at first I experienced a feeling of repulsion for her. Now life would have no charm without her."

"She is a most remarkable adventuress," remarked Mr. Sutton, "and I am very sorry that she has crept into our family."

Lord Tarlington sighed deeply, for he knew that she cared little or nothing for him, her every act showed it. A servant entered with a magnificent bouquet of flowers, which he placed upon the table with the exclamation: "For madam, milor," and immediately retired.

"That's how it goes on all day," groaned his lordship. "She gets as many presents as an opera singer. Fellows have the discretion not to put their cards to them; but I suppose she knows where they come from."

"You may depend upon that," answered Mr. Sutton, taking up the flowers and regarding them with a look of admiration.

There were choice roses, azaleas, camellias, geraniums, pelargoniums, anilax, maidenhair ferns, and a variety of rare exotics, which charmed the eye while they vanished the sense of smell by their incomparable odours.

"This is no poor man's gift," continued Mr. Sutton. "I dare wager that it comes from the Prince de Morny, whose name the public link so persistently with that of your wife. Did it ever occur to you, my dear brother, to look inside one of these handsome bouquets?"

"What for?"

"A scrap of paper—a letter, something which will throw some light upon the donor."

"Never," replied Lord Tarlington.

"Then be good enough to permit me to see if there is not some mysterious misadventure concealed in a little mossy nest. Ha! What is this? By George, the very thing. You see my suspicions were not without some foundation."

Mr. Sutton had been looking among the flowers while he was talking, and he soon discovered a tiny three-cornered note, written on tinted paper, and delicately scented with a subtle perfume. It was hidden beneath the petal of a rose, and was addressed to "Ma chère Marie."

"Read it," exclaimed Tarlington, in a stony voice, while his eyes were fixed and glassy.

The note ran as follows:

"ADORED ONE,

"I implore you to be at my mother's ball this evening. If you wear the diamond cross I gave you I shall know that you think something of your attached Philippe, who sends you a million of kisses."

"That is De Morny. The prince's Christian name is Philippe," said Mr. Sutton, when he had concluded reading the letter. "I heard that his mother received this evening. Shall I put this precious epistle back again and see if Lady Tarlington wears the diamond cross?"

His lordship nodded his head in the affirmative, and the note was replaced in the midst of the bouquet, which was again laid on the table.

"Well, what do you think of that?" asked Mr. Sutton.

"It is enough to drive a man mad. I have a good mind to horsewhip the fellow."

"Don't spoil a good mind. Do it and go back to Tarlington Chase."

"She won't live there. It is too quiet for her. Ha! here she comes."

As his lordship spoke the door opened, and Lady Tarlington, with the air of a queen, swept into the room, nodding to her husband and shaking hands familiarly with Mr. Sutton.

"You are kind to come and see us, my dear brother-in-law," she exclaimed. "We want

company. I lead a very lonely life. Tarlington wants to keep me shut up, as if I married him for that, and he does me the honour to be awfully jealous of me."

"Perhaps he has cause," replied Mr. Sutton, with a meaning look.

"I confess I am a flirt. I always was. Life to a woman like me is not worth having unless I can torment the men. What, more flowers! Oh, how lovely! I wonder who sent them?"

"You may know before long," said his lordship.

"Old grumbler!" exclaimed her ladyship. "Always finding fault or saying something disagreeable. Oh, dear me! what a sacrifice I made when I married you! But no matter. Show your devotion by writing a letter to your steward at Tarlington Chase."

"What about, my dear?"

"I hear that Sandford Newton is visiting Viola, who is living with Herbert Conyers, her blind husband, at the cottage of one of your gamekeepers named Wyman. Order Wyman to be discharged without a character. He will have to give up his cottage, and Viola will be sent packing."

"Why not let the poor thing alone?"

"Because I hate her," answered her ladyship, whose snake-like eyes glistened. "My correspondent tells me that she is happy, and that is more than I am. She must go."

Stooping over her husband, she kissed his forehead, an act of condescension which so charmed him that he immediately wrote the letter ordering the dismissal of Wyman. Mr. Sutton remained to dinner, after which her ladyship went upstairs to dress for the ball to which Lord Tarlington was going to take her. The gentlemen smoked their cigars. His lordship was feverishly impatient to see his wife. If she wore the diamond cross he would know that she had read the note, and had put it on to please the Prince de Morny.

Her ladyship's toilet consumed two hours, the hairdresser alone being with her for an hour, and it was ten o'clock before she was ready to enter her carriage. Mr. Sutton was going to leave the city that night, so he did not accompany his brother and his wife to the ball.

Nevertheless, he waited until her ladyship made her appearance, and smiled inwardly when he saw that she had attached to a heavy gold chain which she wore round her neck a cross of diamonds.

"She wears the cross," whispered Lord Tarlington.

"Yes, and you will have to bear it," replied his brother, significantly, in the same low tone.

Lord Tarlington offered his arm to his wife, and conducted her to the carriage which was in waiting. They took leave of Mr. Sutton at the door, and were rapidly driven up the Champs Elysées to the sumptuous mansion of the Duchess de Morny.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

EXPOSED.

"Why do you wear that cross, Marie?" asked Lord Tarlington, when they were comfortably settled in the carriage.

"I scarcely know," she replied. "It was a fancy of mine. Is it not pretty?"

"Yes; but I do not think you would have put it on if the Prince de Morny had not asked you."

She bestowed a sharp, quick glance on him, and read in his face that he knew her secret.

"So you examine my presents and read my letters?" she exclaimed. "You are mean and contemptible enough for that. Well, I will not attempt to hide anything. The prince gave me this cross, and it is natural that he should like to see me wear it. Are you satisfied now?"

Lord Tarlington had no time to reply, for the carriage drove up, and they alighted. The majority of the guests had already assembled, and they were soon in the crowded ball-room, amongst princes of the blood royal, ambassadors and distinguished people of every de-

scription. After being received by their hostess her ladyship was soon surrounded by many admirers. His lordship took advantage of an opportunity to say to her:

"Oblige me by not dancing with the prince."

"I shall exercise my own discretion," she replied, withering him with a look.

At this reply he left her and sought the card-room, where he was soon engaged in gambling recklessly, so that in the excitement he derived from play he might lose the café which sat so heavily on his heart. Lady Tarlington was soon found by the prince, who led her out for a walk.

They threaded the mazes of the dance, promenaded afterwards, until the music ceased, when he conducted her to a seat, and left her alone, she having promised to dance with him again shortly. She had not been alone a minute before a dapper little man approached her. No sooner had she set her eyes upon him than she turned pale.

"How do you do, Madam Menzies?" he exclaimed.

"I do not know you, sir," she replied, with a slightly supercilious elevation of the eyebrows.

"Pardon me, you know me only too well. I am Monsieur Dubois, detective, at your service."

"Very well. I am Lady Tarlington. What can you do to me?"

"Certainly, as Lord Tarlington has been foolish enough to marry you, as I suppose he is now finding out to his cost, and as I have no evidence against you in that infamous affair, I—"

"To what do you allude?" she asked, interrupting him.

"The extortion of the confession from Viola!"

"Is that all? You cannot arrest me for that. Go away, sir, or I will have you expelled from this room. Persons like you—common detectives, have no right here."

Dubois smiled.

"There you are wrong again. We go everywhere. I am specially employed to-night to see that no improper characters enter these rooms. Do you hear me?—no improper characters!"

"Well, I am Lady Tarlington. But a truce to this nonsense. What do you want of me?"

"Now you are becoming sensible, and talking as you should do. I will tell you in a very few words what I require from you. It is only Miss Agnew's address."

"I do not know it, and if I did is it likely I would give it to you to injure myself?" replied the woman, fiercely.

"You do know it, for I am convinced you are paying her handsomely to keep her quiet, and if you do not tell me I shall be under the painful necessity of exposing you. In other words, I will make your true character known to the Duchess de Morny!"

"My past is buried," said Lady Tarlington, "and you are merely trying to frighten me. What is the use of talking to a woman of the world as if she were a silly child. Bah! if I say one word to the Prince de Morny, who is my friend, it is not I who will leave this house in disgrace."

"By all means do it," said Dubois, coolly. "I ask you for your friend's address, and your refusal to give it me. You must take the consequences."

"I should think that your detective skill is at fault if you cannot find Miss Agnew," replied Lady Tarlington, sarcastically.

"It is; but we have various ways of arriving at our ends, and it is my plan to work through you."

"Then you will be disappointed. I heard from Miss Agnew this morning, and she gratefully acknowledged the receipt of a cheque I sent her. You will get nothing out of her. I assure you that she is devoted to me, whatever she may have said when she heard of my marriage with Lord Tarlington. You are only wasting your time, Monsieur Dubois. From a

man of your reputation and sagacity I should have expected something better. Miss Harcourt could not have a worse agent."

Dubois turned angrily away under her searching criticism, but the first person he saw was the Prince de Morny. Lady Tarlington saw him at the same time, and looking plaintively at him, said:

"Prince!"

"Did you call me, madam?" he asked.

"I am compelled to. Will you please have this man turned out of your house; he has grossly insulted me?"

"Impossible!"

"It is a fact," said her ladyship.

The prince turned to M. Dubois and regarded him with a stern expression.

"Monsieur!" he exclaimed, "you have heard what this lady has said, and as this house belongs as much to me as to my mother, I must ask you to leave it at once and save me the trouble of having you removed by my servants."

Dubois twisted his moustache with an air of indifference.

"Do you know who this woman is?" he asked.

"Every woman in this house is a lady," answered the prince, "and I will thank you to speak of this gentlewoman as such."

"I tell you that she is an impostor!" cried Dubois, loudly. "She has been sentenced to penal servitude at the Bagne at Toulon!"

Lady Tarlington looked as if she was going to faint.

"He is mad!" she murmured.

As for the prince, his head reeled, and he could have fallen to the floor at this terrible denunciation.

"Prove it," he said. "I cannot believe that the wife of an English nobleman can be what you have alleged."

"I can easily prove it, and I will. Let her walk into a private chamber."

"Who are you?"

"An agent of police," said Dubois, folding his arms proudly.

Prince de Morny was still more astonished. He could not understand this extraordinary scene, which so horribly compromised the woman he thought so much of. It had been his intention to flirt with her until her husband called him out, when he would, he hoped, shoot him and marry his widow.

Lady Tarlington rose and took the prince's arm. She was greatly agitated, and had to some extent lost her self-possession. Her face changed as if by magic and she looked pale and haggard, so much so that she appeared in a few minutes to have aged ten years.

The music sounded and the company took their places for a quadrille. Ladies of the first rank faced gentlemen wearing crosses and decorations which they had gained in the diplomatic world and on the field of battle.

"For heaven's sake protect me from this dreadful man," whispered Lady Tarlington. "His conduct will kill me."

"I am with you and will see justice done you, madam," answered the prince. "Follow me, sir," he added to Dubois, "we cannot talk here."

He led the way to his private cabinet or study, which he unlocked with a silver key. Dubois saw them cross the threshold and then disappear for a moment. The detective had seen Lord Tarlington in the card room. He went to him. Touching him on the shoulder he looked meaningly at him.

"The Prince de Morny requests the pleasure of your company, my lord, immediately!" he exclaimed.

"What for?"

"He will explain when he sees you."

Lord Tarlington excused himself to his partner, with whom he was playing at baccarat, and hastened to obey the summons. Consequently they entered the cabinet together.

"You see he dare not say anything further," her ladyship was remarking.

Dubois bowed with mock politeness.

"Can he not?" he exclaimed; "we will see about that."

"Come to the point, monsieur," cried the prince, imperiously. "I insist upon it. You charged this lady with being a criminal, and with having suffered an infamous punishment?"

"I did," Dubois replied, calmly.

"The man is mistaken. He knows not what he says. You are here, prince, my husband is here. Will you not order him away?" pleaded her ladyship.

The tears stood in her eyes, and her distress was pitiable to witness. As for Lord Tarlington, he stood like one stupefied.

"I declare," continued Dubois, "that Madam Menzies, now Lady Tarlington, was tried before the Correctional Tribunal in Bordeaux in the year 1852 for felony, and that she was condemned to ten years' hard labour."

"It is false!" cried her ladyship, whose face was mantled by a crimson blush. "Oh, it is intolerable that I should be subjected to this sort of thing."

Dubois made a spring at her and tore the sleeve of her dress, revealing her naked shoulder. Lord Tarlington and the prince stepped forward simultaneously.

"What means this outrage?" they asked.

Lady Tarlington sank on her knees and buried her face in her hands, as if she was completely cowed. Dubois pointed to the shoulder.

"It means," he replied, "that she bears the stigma of her crime branded upon her flesh. Behold the fleur de lys!"

Both men shrank back aghast, for they saw by the light of the lamp which burned on the table the indelible mark of the convict, burnt into the flesh by a red-hot iron—the fleur de lys. The Prince de Morny dared not fight against this damning evidence of her guilt, and saying, "I am convinced," slowly left the room, as much crushed as was the victim of the astute detective's exposure.

In fact, Madam Menzies, when quite young, had been convicted of stealing a large amount of money. She was an inmate of the prison at Toulon for two years, and it was impossible to disguise the matter any longer. Lord Tarlington had never noticed the mark before, and he was overwhelmed at his wife's disgrace.

"Marie," he said, "I have seen and heard enough. We part to-night. Henceforth we meet as strangers."

This remark roused her. She rose to her feet, glaring at him like a tigress, her bosom rising and falling with the intensity of her emotion.

"Not so," she replied. "You have married me, and whatever I have been, I am still your wife. You cannot, shall not desert me. Take me away from here. I am disgraced, but that wretch shall suffer for it."

Lord Tarlington hesitated a moment, and then he offered her his arm. They quickly left the apartment together. In the hall she put on her cloak. Their carriage was called, and they drove away.

"Well," muttered Dubois, "I have exposed the adventuress, but I do not see what I have gained by it. I am just as far off finding Miss Agnew as I was before, and without her I can do nothing. Where on earth can she be hiding?"

This consideration perplexed him all the evening, and when the ball was over he was no nearer a solution of the difficulty than he had been before.

VIOLA and Herbert had been living very happily together all this time, and were quite reconciled to their lot. Sometimes she wished she was the owner of Tarlington Chase again, for then she would go to eminent doctors and see if something could not be done for Herbert's eyes. It was so odd that he should have gone blind in the way he did. Surely the skill of an oculist might effect some alleviation of his utter misery.

The kettle was hissing on the hob, and Viola

was making some toast for Herbert's tea. They had nothing else to eat, for business had been bad with Viola of late. The season had commenced in London, the ladies had gone away to town, and there was very little dressmaking to be done. They had been borrowing money from Wyman, who in his turn had been borrowing from somebody else, and Sandford Newton, to whom she applied for assistance, had written to say that he was in straitened circumstances. Still she kept up her courage, and did not murmur, hoping for better times. When the tea was ready she led Herbert to the table, and while handing him the tea, Wyman entered the room.

"Good evening," she exclaimed. "Will you join us in a humble cup of tea, Mr. Wyman?"

"Thank you, no, ma'am," he replied. "The fact is, I've had bad news to-day."

"Indeed! I am sorry to hear that."

"The steward sent for me, and I am discharged; what for I don't know. How I shall get a living I can't tell. I'm in debt as it is, and I shall have to give up the cottage, I am afraid."

This intelligence came as a great shock to Viola, for she knew what sacrifices he had made to have them in his house, and she had long felt that she was a burden to him.

"Perhaps, if we go, you can struggle on," Viola remarked.

"I don't know, ma'am," answered Wyman, standing in the doorway, and turning his felt hat awkwardly in his hand. "I've been talking to the missis, and she says that if we could get some lodgers who would pay rent while I'm looking for another job we might get along. Of course, ma'am, you understand that we feel your kindness to us, but when it is a case of starvation—"

"Do not say anything more, Wyman," interrupted Viola. "I feel that we have trespassed on your kindness too long, and I would not have done it if I had not expected more money than we have received."

"You can stay as long as you like, ma'am. I told my old woman that they might take the roof off before I would turn you out, and—"

"It is quite sufficient," she interrupted again. "We will leave to-morrow."

Wyman looked distressed, but Viola's manner was so decided that it did not give him a chance of saying anything more, therefore he bowed and retired. The steward had told him that he was discharged for harbouring Mrs. Conyers, and if he got rid of her he might be reinstated in his old position.

Work was scarce, and he had his wife and daughter to think of. While he was in employment he would have done anything for them, but when he told his wife all about it she was anxious to keep her little home, and she had instructed him to go to Viola and tell her that she must look out for some other place.

It was hard, but Viola's pride and sense of what was just induced her to depart without any further favours. Accordingly she packed up the few things that belonged to her and Herbert and went to the nearest town, which was named Allington, Wyman borrowing a cart for her and her husband to travel in. On arriving in the town she engaged a room, made Herbert as comfortable as she could, and went out to seek employment, which was absolutely needed, as she had only a few shillings in her pocket.

In spite of her utmost efforts, she could not succeed in getting anything to do, and was nearly distracted at her ill success. Herbert did not know the straits she was reduced to, but when they had nothing to eat but bread he guessed the truth, and one morning, after Viola had gone out, he groped his way downstairs and emerged into the street.

(To be Concluded in our Next.)

UNEASY lies the head that wears a crown," is absurd, because no sensible king ever goes to bed with his crown on. He always hangs it on the back of a chair with his vest.



[CHARITY.]

ONE SUMMER AT CEDAR GROVE.

WELL, Susie dear, I am safe and sound at Mrs. Merrill's, though I think when you hear what I have been through since you and I parted at the station in B—, you will wonder that I have not died of despair.

You know I told you that after going as far as L— by rail, I had to take the stage to Cedar Grove. At L— I got out of the train and looked for my stage; there were two large carriages, and I asked a man who was standing with his hands plunged deep in his pockets which of these was the stage to Cedar Grove.

"No such place."

"Oh, but there is too, and a stage goes there from L—."

He looked impudently at me, and he said with a kind of sneer:

"Never heard on it."

I then walked up to the driver of the first carriage I came to, and said:

"Is this the stage to Cedar Grove?"

"No, miss."

I looked at the other carriage, but saw in large gilt letters on the back, "Ordway Stage, Ordway House; so I went into the little station, and asked the station-master if Cedar Grove were near there. He was a very young man, who tried to be dignified and was consequently very stiff; he looked over his shirt collar at me

while I spoke, and then said Cedar Grove was two miles from L—.

"Could I get a carriage?"

He thought—imagined I mean—not.

"Could I have my trunk taken there?"

"Yes, oh, yes! The stage goes up every day."

"Will you be kind enough to show me where I can find out about having it taken there?"

And he said, condescendingly, that he would take me to the baggage porter. By this time, dear Susie, I was reduced to such a state of meekness that I feared I might bob a little courtesy to the sweet youth; however, I did not. I found the baggage porter, a kind-looking man, old enough not to be dignified, made arrangements for the welfare of the trunk, and then asked if I could find my way to Cedar Grove.

"Bless yer heart, miss," said the old man, beaming benevolently on me, "the stage are only jist gone."

"The stage? Which? Where?"

"Orderway! Why, bless me, didn't yer know it?"

I felt like crying, but "smiled sadly," as the novelists say, and asked if I could not walk.

"Well, yes, yer kin; but, bless me, it's kind of puzzlesome, that it is."

Then he scratched his head for inspiration, and gave me the following lucid direction:

"Jist you walk straight on till yer come to that big house with the yaller fence; there's four roads; take the middle one to the right,

walk on till ye come to two cross roads, keep straight on, and when ye come to a big oak tree turn to the left and foller along till ye come to a stone wall; there's two roads there, but I'm bless'd if I kin tell yer which to follow then; it's jist by Cedar Grove, though, and anybody kin tell yer. I'm right down sorry yer missed the stage."

So was I, but I thanked him, and with some misgivings as to the size of my bump of locality, I walked "straight on," and tried to follow the rather enigmatical directions, missed the "yaller fence," took a wrong road, but, after going on what I may call with more truth than elegance, a dog trot, back and forth, at last reached the big oak and the stone wall. There were the two roads, but, like the baggage porter, I could only say, "I'm blessed if I know which one to foller."

It was getting dark and I was getting frightened, and to add to my alarm a drunken man in a waggon stopped, and, calling me "Sis," asked me to "go with him and see granny." Of course I walked on pretty fast in the road where he was not. It happened to be the road I was to go, and just then a man came along driving a carriage, whom I accosted with my worn out question of:

"Where is Cedar Grove?"

He answered mine by another.

"Are you Miss Wayland?"

"Yes."

"Well'm, Miss Bertha sent me down to the station for you, seein' you didn't come in the stage; she was afeard you'd missed it, she was."

I got in with him, and in a few minutes my troubles on that score were ended, and I was in Bertha's pleasant home, and the beautiful little room I am to occupy during my stay here.

Cedar Grove, you must know, is the name of Mrs. Merrill's and Mrs. Livingstone's places, which adjoin, and originally belonged to one person. They belong to the village of Ordway, hence all my trouble; as Bertha had forgotten to impart that important fact to me.

Bertha is just as dear and lovely as when you and I were at school with her. She asked lots of questions about you, and we often speak of those happy old school days. There is a cousin of hers staying with her—a Miss Courtney; she belongs, on her father's side, to an old Dutch family, and from her mother has French blood in her veins, which may account for the grace with which she performs every act.

I never saw anyone like her, she is perfectly fascinating, and whatever she attempts, whether dancing, talking, playing the piano, setting the table for dinner, or helping her aunt with dainties in the kitchen—which last two she is fond of doing—she looks and moves as if she had been created for that especial purpose. She has a beautiful rose-leaf colour on her cheeks, creamy complexion, dark, wavy, curly hair always in a state of bewitching entanglement, dark blue eyes and a delicious little mouth, with the prettiest of little white, even teeth. Aunt Sylvia, of whom we used to hear Bertha speak, is here also, and with all her peculiarities in full force.

There is also expected a Mr. Melrose, Bertha's brother, and Miss Courtney's brother, Tom. The young ladies from Mrs. Livingstone's are frequent visitors; indeed, we seem like one family, the houses are so close to each other, only a low hedge between the two places, and a gravel drive common to both houses. I will give you the names of their family and visitors.

Miss Julia and Maria Livingstone, Mr. George Livingstone, and another brother, Henry, who is expected to arrive next week with two friends, a Mr. Davies and his sister, Mr. Eliot and Miss Emily Warburton, brother and sister. Now I have presented to you all my characters, that I may not have to drag in anyone unceremoniously in future letters.

Mrs. Livingstone is a widow, and you know Captain Merrill being in the navy is now off on duty. We have had one or two croquet parties, but gaiety does not really begin until all the

company assembles. There are two or three pleasant girls in the village who have called here, also Mr. Plonsete, a young curate in spectacles. I do wonder if those sprigs of theology are really near-sighted, or if they only wear glasses to look wise and learned. If they only knew what frights they made of themselves! And I always forget they are not deaf also, and shout as loud as if speaking to old Granny Smith. Now, dear Susie, you must be tired of this long letter. Good-bye. Lovingly, your friend,
EDITH WAYLAND.

I have been at Cedar Grove three weeks, dear Susie, and feel like a butterfly. We almost live out of doors, boating, riding or driving in the morning, croquet from about five until six, in the evening sitting on the piazza or strolling about by moonlight, when the moon is accommodating enough to shine; when she does not, we have games and music indoors, with the usual amount of summer flirtation, in some cases to become an all the year round affair.

Mr. Plonsete is Miss Courtney's most devoted; she is a puzzle; one can hardly fathom her meaning; under her apparent light-heartedness there seems to lurk some bitterness, and at times she utterly disregards the feelings of every one. Mr. Plonsete is certainly a goose, but even geese should not be plucked too rudely, and I think she goes too far, or rather lets him do so, if she is only making game of him.

However, it is funny to hear Aunt Sylvia take her to task. Here is what passed yesterday evening. Miss Courtney entered the room after a long moonlight stroll with the curate. Aunt Sylvia looked her all over through her spectacles as if she were some new and curious specimen of humanity, and then said, severely, looking over her spectacles:

"Edith Courtney," (it is a peculiarity of Aunt Sylvia's always to address people by both of their names) "Edith Courtney, do you mean to marry that poor young man?"

With a look of innocent surprise Miss Courtney answered:

"What poor young man, Aunt Sylvia?"

"That poor young minister youth, Mr. Edward Plonsete."

Edith opened her eyes very wide, and said, slowly:

"Is Mr. Edward Plonsete very poor? And did he really get you to ask me to marry him? How very funny, Aunt Sylvia! Really, I never heard anything so queer."

"Edith Courtney, I don't know what will be the end of you."

"I suppose not, and never will; you are older than I, you know."

"Older, miss! Yes, indeed; and wiser, I hope! You never see me acting so, galavanting about in the moonlight with your ministers!" (Aunt Sylvia is about sixty-five.)

Edith looked thoughtful, and then said, slowly:

"Why, no; I don't even remember seeing it done; but I don't know much about the antediluvian ages."

"You needn't sneer over my age; you'll grow old yourself if you live long enough, and I suppose you will. The good die first. My patience! in my day respectable girls didn't flirt so."

"Didn't they, auntie? How did respectable people flirt when you were young?"

"Respectable people didn't flirt at all."

"Then how did people who were not respectable flirt? How did you flirt?"

To use one of Tom Merrill's speeches, "The corks of a dozen vials of wrath popped out" and the contents of them all splashed over Edith.

This is only one of many such encounters. I really think that though Aunt Sylvia is odd and a little meddlesome, her age should be her protection, for in many respects she is a good old soul, and really enjoys seeing us happy.

Mr. Courtney and Miss Warburton are having a very sentimental botany partnership, and tear to pieces, in a ruthless way which exasperates me, who only love the blossoms, all the flowers

they can find. To be sure it generally ends in a language of flowers lesson.

Mr. Davies and Miss Julia Livingstone are deep in geology, and I really think have each succeeded in finding a precious jewel in the heart of the other. It is wonderful to see how close their heads will get in examining a specimen, and how if their fingers touch by accident, the said specimen will fall to the ground, and her cheeks rival the garment in colour; they are a handsome pair.

Mr. Melrose generally pairs off with Miss Maria Livingstone; but perhaps that is only habit.

Tom, who is just sixteen, has climbed in love with Miss Davies, who is about twenty-eight. The immense height to which he has aspired makes him rather dizzy, and she, as well as we all, is greatly amused. He seems to have broken out into jewellery, and must spend quite a small fortune on cravats and hair oil, which smells of cinnamon. Poor Tom! he was caught trying to shave with his penknife one morning; he looked like a scraped sheep's head all day after.

Mr. Warburton is extremely handsome and gentlemanly. He has travelled a good deal, and is very pleasant to talk with, and when we are out boating chants the sweetest little gondola songs, which he learned while in Venice. He is a lawyer. I am sure you would like him. I wonder if you will ever meet.

How are you and Dr. Harper getting on? I am expecting you to ask my services as bridesmaid. You must have a High Church wedding, as I believe he is rather inclined to Ritualism. Don't let it be a morning marriage; everyone looks so dismal then; mind you have acolytes and candle-lights, and all the other wonderful lights of the age, not forgetting the most brilliant light of all—I mean your most loving, though at present rather scatter-brained friend,

EDDY WAYLAND.

I have been nick-named Eddy to distinguish me from Miss Courtney.

DEAR SUSIE,—A long time has passed since my last letter to you, and what stirring events have occurred in our little community, which of course I must chronicle, though I fear you will think I have become a regular old gossiping Tabby. I must have a safety-valve, and I know you want to hear all that I am interested in, and of course will be anxious to know how all the flirtations are progressing.

First, "that poor young minister youth," after twittering around Miss Courtney for so long, was discovered to be already engaged to two ladies, both preparing to be married to him—the wretch! I do wonder why any woman will marry such a creature. Poor Miss Courtney! Of course we all knew she was only amusing herself; still it was rather mortifying to find she also was being fooled.

I think she rather dreaded one of Aunt Sylvia's speeches; but the old lady was merciful and silent, and Edith carried it off as only she could do, indifferently and gaily, though she makes more sharp speeches than ever. But she is really very kind-hearted, only seeming ashamed of it and annoyed when caught performing some kind act. Only yesterday, while we were out for a walk, a miserable looking child met us, and asked shyly, and not as if used to begging:

"Gimme a penny, please. Father's sick, and craves a apple."

One or two of us gave her some coppers, but Miss Courtney only laughed and said to us "Pooh!" and to the child:

"Father craves a apple, do he? What is the matter wi' he?"

"He's got a information of the lungs."

"Oh, how long since he got the 'information'?"

"He got it six weeks ago come Monday'm, a-gettin' wet a-ditchin', and he's gettin' better, he is; but Doctor Brown says he's to eat a plenty, and we ain't got nothin', hardly, and father says he's starving like for a apple, and

sich. But we ain't got no apples nor no money, and father can't ditch now, and mother she couldn't wash much while he was so sick, so I kinder thought I'd ask somebody for a penny. I hope mother won't scold, though."

"Well, child, maybe she won't; you had better go and get that apple at once. Good-bye."

Then we walked on, and she laughed at us for being so verdant as to believe that wise infant, who would have a feast of candy with our cash. Just then she said she wanted her handkerchief, and did believe that awful little beggar had taken it, and told us to walk on while she went back. I saw her speak to the child. When she returned she said coolly that her handkerchief was in her pocket all the time. This morning I happened to meet the child, and asked how her father was.

"He's better, miss; and oh, the young lady what came back and asked where we lived comed last evenin' with a basket of grapes and apples. And oh, miss, a whole chicking for father. Father says she's a rare lady, she is."

Now, Susie, listen. There is to be a large party next week at Mrs. Livingstone's. Last evening we were all making out a list of things to be sent to town for. She had told us before that she meant to send for "a ton of rose-buds to wear with her white silk." Last evening she provoked us all by her nonchalant refusal to send for anything.

The idea of dressing so for a country party. She would wear her white dress, of course, in honour to her hostess; but she would not get French flowers just for rural orbs to gaze at. And we all believed her. I know now "father" is probably eating those French flowers. I hate to hear them blaming her for "airs," but I cannot tell what she is so evidently determined to keep a secret. What an incomprehensible mixture she is.

Mr. Davies and Julia Livingstone have not done looking for "roc's eggs,"—one of Tom's witticisms—yet, though they are engaged, and to be married this winter, "money being no object" on either side. For once, the course of true love seems to have run true. Mr. Melrose has gone away, but he will return in time to be best man at the wedding, where of course Maria will be first bridesmaid, and more unlikely things may be announced than their engagement then.

Tom has gone back to school, where he may fall out of love with Miss Davies. Anyway, his funny adoration for her can do him no harm; she is perfectly lovely, so calm, serene and bright, like a beautiful summer day. It rests one amid all this gay turmoil just to look at her, and get one of her beautiful, sweet smiles.

As for Mr. Warburton, dear Susie, you will know him some day, I hope, and be sure to like him. He is too good and splendid for any words. I am coming home very soon, and he may happen to be there also some time. Until then you can let your imagination run wild.

I am so glad you and your doctor are to be happy so soon; his father's idea that forty-five was soon enough for any man to marry filled me with forebodings that you might be engaged for about twenty years. I am glad that the old gentleman has got into a sane streak at last. Good-bye, dear; one more letter, perhaps, before leaving this summer paradise.—Your exalted friend,
EDDY.

MY DEAR SUSIE,—My last letter for this summer from this most heavenly spot; it must be a short one, for I have promised to go out boating with my friend. These boatings! How delicious! Next year he says we will go to Venice. Won't it be delightful?

Our summer party has diminished in numbers. Nearly everyone has gone home, and all agree that there never was such a summer before. Certainly there never were so many engagements—two since I wrote last: George Livingstone to Bertha. I, even I, did not dream of it. They always seemed so brother-and-sisterish. They have been neighbours for so many years, and

always the closest of friends. But I think all these pairs of lovers opened their eyes. Yet I think we don't act foolishly.

The other is Miss Courtney, and a most romantic affair—quite like a story. It seems she was nearly engaged years ago to a lieutenant in the navy, but they had some trifling quarrel which would probably have been made up, only his brother, who had made other matrimonial plans for him, by a skilful misrepresentation of each of their sayings to the other, kept open the sore feeling on each side, and when, by-and-bye, he was ordered off on foreign service, he left without ever meeting Miss Courtney, who believed that he had been merely passing his idle hours in amusing himself at her expense; which idea not unnaturally made her caustic, and rather sceptical of the affection of anyone. Poor girl, no wonder she was so sarcastic sometimes.

Well, last week Miss Warburton wished to go to Brighton for a few days, and invited Miss Courtney to accompany her. One morning, while they were walking, whom should they meet but Lieutenant Chelson. The surprise to them both was so great that for a happy moment everything but the pleasure of meeting was forgotten, and after that it was impossible to freeze up again, so he walked home with them, and Emily Warburton, like the darling she is, contrived they should be left alone, when they had an explanation, and we may suppose a grand reconciliation, with sweet things thrown in ad libitum.

And so she came back to Cedar Grove looking radiantly lovely, all trace of bitterness and unhappiness gone, and her really sweet, sunny nature beaming out all over her. I hope he will marry her now without his brother's assistance or advice. Aunt Sylvia fanned herself vigorously with a big turkey's tail, which she keeps hanging at her side, when she was told of it, and then said:

"Well, Edith Courtney, I'm right glad that young minister youth was engaged to them poor, deluded girls, though 'twas sinful, for you might have been tempted to marry him just for spite, and then how'd you have felt now?"

"All at sea, dear auntie."

Aunt Sylvia says it has been the most remarkable summer she ever knew, and she really wouldn't have been surprised if somebody had asked her to marry him—though she hopes she would have had more sense than to do so.

Tom writes home in an ecstasy of delight at Bertha's engagement, and wants to know if he may not have a "tail coat and stovepipe hat to be groomsmen in!"

He has been a great source of amusement to us this summer, a thorough boy, full of wild pranks, but never doing or saying an ill-natured thing. Now, Susie dear, I must go. Edith— isn't it a beautiful name?—is waiting for me. Next week you will see him, and, your happy friend,

EDITH WATLAND.

"I suppose, dear Susie, you have been looking for me, as Marianna in the moated grange looked for her young man, and every day have repeated, 'She cometh not.' Ah, me! what a chapter of accidents I have to relate!"

I must begin where I left off. You remember in my last that Edith and I were going boating. Little did I dream then what my experience in "flood and field" were to be. We started in brightest spirits; the day was glorious, it seemed to us as if all nature were smiling in sympathy with our felicity.

We floated on, too deliciously happy to talk much, and I suppose did not attend well to our steering. At all events the boat struck a rock which was hiding its head just beneath the water, struck it with a bang, and I sprang up instead of being quiet, that upset the boat, and all I remember afterwards was finding myself drawn in a little eddy going round and round, and then feeling Edith's hand hold of mine, and then I knew no more until I found myself in a bed between warm blankets, with two women, it seemed to me, pounding the breath out of me.

I will not give the details of our rescue. You must wait until I see you for that. The boat was, as I said, upset by my movement, and instantly filled and sank, which caused the eddy in which I was caught, and would probably have been drowned had Edith not pulled me away.

We had been watched by a party of men on the shore, who saw that we were steering right for the sunken rock, and as soon as we struck they put out in a boat to our assistance.

When they reached us, Edith was quite exhausted. He was struck on the head by something which nearly stunned him for a moment, and his arm was strained in trying to right the boat, and the wonder is how he kept afloat with my dead weight to support. Oh, Susie, to think we have been so near death together will surely make our love more perfect, as we joined our thanks to Him who was our help in that awful moment. But that is something we cannot talk about.

Edith's arm was a good deal hurt, and the strain is more painful than broken bones. Just think of his holding me up while suffering so much himself! But if he had not, Susie, I should not now be writing this.

They got us on the boat, and when we landed Edith also was insensible. I was carried to a house near the shore, where the lady takes boarders, Edith to the hotel, nearly opposite.

My hostess was kindness itself, and I had every care and attention both from her and my Cedar Grove friends, who came frequently to see me for a few minutes; but I was very weak and nervous, and the doctor ordered quiet, and that I should not be moved. I used to lie in or on the bed in a half daze, and sometimes hear edifying conversations. One of the boarders, with a dry, acid voice, asked Mrs. Ellis, my hostess, one day just outside my door, if "the young woman" was better. Mrs. Ellis said:

"Yes, but she is very weak; it was a narrow escape from death."

"'Twas a Providence she was saved, and perhaps it may be an awakening, so she will renounce her wild and sinful ways and be a Christian."

"Sinful ways!" echoed Mrs. Ellis, in an astonished voice. "Do you know anything about her?"

"I know she's been one of that gay set at Cedar Grove, where they played and danced all summer, and I know she was alone in the boat with a young man when this judgment fell on her."

"And pray," said Mrs. Ellis, coldly, "did you never go anywhere alone with a young man before you were married? As for dancing, there never was so much harm done by dancing as there has been by uncharitable tongues. The Bible does not forbid dancing; there is not a word against it in the whole book. When the Prodigal returns there is feasting and dancing. But the Bible is full of denunciations against 'lying, slandering, and evil speaking of every kind.' For my part I believe men and women were meant to mingle freely in society, and provided the woman always retains herself-respect and allows no impropriety in speech or action, both sexes are improved in mind and morals by the association. The worst of men will hardly dare take a liberty with a really modest woman, but prudes are not always modest. I feel quite sure this young lady is neither wild nor sinful. I understand she is engaged to the young man with whom she was boating. I have not yet met him, and do not wish to prejudice; but I have no doubt he is a gentleman."

Vinegar face, as I mentally called her, walked off, leaving my dear little champion victor in the field. Was not she brave to say all that in defence of a stranger to one of her boarders, whom she may lose in return for her courage?

Miss Courtney found her way to my resting-place often; her lieutenant rowed her down twice, and they came and went in safety. Vinegar face, as we called her, and she were always having tiffs. Miss Courtney is just the one to put her down.

One day she asked Edith if Miss Margaret Davies were one of the party at Cedar Grove.

Edith said yes, and asked if Vinegar face—whose real name, strangely enough, was Mrs. Sweet—knew her.

"No, miss, I don't know her, but I've heard of her."

I began to wonder if she too were wild and sinful.

"I suppose she's often kind of melancholy like. I wonder she should go a-visiting and seek the world's distractions after such an experience."

"What do you mean?" said Edith, in her clearest and most steely tones.

"Well, they did say she was fond of a young Mr. Haliburton, and, indeed, he was a nice young man."

"I don't believe it," said Edith, hotly. "That splendid Margaret Davies 'fond of' a nice young man!"

I wish I could give her scornful tones.

"I don't see why not," said Mrs. Sweet. "He was very nice."

"Then I am sure Miss Davies could not have cared for him. The idea of her caring for lanky-haired, big-mouthed, watery-eyed, knock-kneed, nice young man! Impossible."

"Mr. Haliburton did not look so," said Vinegar face, sharply. "He was very handsome."

"Then he was the only nice young man I ever heard of who was; they all look like idiots."

And then Edith, seeing the pucker in her adversary's mouth, wound up her speech by whistling a snatch of a comic song. She makes me laugh at her odd ways, and though that may sound fast, she is not at all so, but perfectly lady-like and refined.

I wonder how much of the story was true; she looks as if she might have a story; but I agree with Edith in thinking that beautiful, serene woman could never have been "fond of" a "nice young man." It sounds too mawkish and sentimental. She would love with all her great, strong heart, not do such a drivelling thing as to be "fond of" anybody worthy to be her husband. She is the most calm and restful person I know.

Now, my dear friend, Edith has come and says I must write no more, and for me "to hear him is to obey." It is so good to know I may always trust him. Perhaps in time he may make something sensible of me. I must try to be worthy of him. Good-bye. Yours more soberly, but with as true friendship.—EDITH WATLAND.

J. D. W.

FACETIÆ.

AS IT SHOULD BE!

("Young persons ought, above all things, to cultivate perfect candour."—Manual of Etiquette.)

VISITOR: "Is Miss Percival at home?"

SERVANT: "No, miss. Did you wish to see her?"

VISITOR: "Lor', no! I wanted her to see me!"

—Funny Folks.

THE ARTIST'S BEST FRIEND.

(Scene: Royal Academy Exhibition, before Mr. Val Prinsep's "Delhi Durbar.")

LADY (to artist): "How you must all hate this gigantic work!"

ARTIST: "On the contrary, we ought to be infinitely obliged to Mr. Prinsep for it."

LADY: "Why, I hear that its occupying so much room has kept hundreds of artists out of the exhibition."

ARTIST: "Perhaps so; but consider the splendid excuse it has given thousands for being out of it!"

—Funny Folks.

HAY MEETING MEMORIES.

The following document, in a lady's handwriting, was picked up a day or two ago in the neighbourhood of Exeter Hall:

10 a.m.—Society for providing the South Sea

Islanders with hearthrugs. Most delightful meeting. Took my woolwork, and was able to do the whole of the toes of one slipper.

1 p.m.—Lunched with the committee. A very profitable hour. Talked chiefly of the great tribulation coming on the earth. The mock turtle was very good.

3 p.m.—Meeting for the regular supply of butcher's meat to cannibals. No missionaries could be found for the work, and it was regretted there was not a surplus of these dear good men. A ribald person sitting next to me said it was a good thing, as cannibals were not likely to care for a spare missionary.

6 p.m.—Society for the abolition of tattooing. Finished quite a yard of crewel work.

8 p.m.—Society for—I quite forget what the subject was, for dear Mrs. Scandleon was telling me all about the dreadful goings on of those bold, forward Miss Highsteppers. Began heel of slipper. Am getting quite expert at the back stitch. —Funny Folks.

IRRE-CLAIMABLE.

FRIEND: "I say, when are you going to pay me that sovereign I lent you? Mind I shan't ask you for it again."

IMPECUNIOUS: "You won't? By Jove, now that's what I call real friendship. I say, you haven't such a thing as—"

Creditor rushes off. —Judy.

A REGULAR TURK.

TOMMY (who has just been operated on): "I mean to be a dentist when I grow up."

AUNT ANNIE: "Why, dear?"

TOMMY: "To have revenge!" —Punch.

OUR CLUB.

MEMBER (bursting into card-room, 9 am): "Oh, waiter, have you—I fancy last night I must have dropped a fi' pound—"

WAITER: "Here it is, sir, 'sing'lar thing, sir, see it under the table direct'ly I come into the room. Lucky I got here fust before any o' the members, sir!" —Punch.

THE NEW SLEEVE.

GRANNY (from the country): "But why do they all show the tops of their arms in that ridiculous manner?"

YOUTH: "The fact is, grandma, they're all going to be vaccinated after supper!" —Punch.

A good pastor, a widower, proposed to a young lady a short time since, but was rejected. His feeling had the second severe test when a widow neighbour sent him the following text to preach: "You ask and receive not because you ask amiss." (James iv., 3.)

A LADY recently made this mistake: "Mr. and Mrs. — respectfully request your presents at the marriage of their daughter."

"LITTLE LAMB."

FARM BAILIFF (to boy): "Shearers 'll shear you as they do the sheep, Master Freddy."

Boy: "No, they won't, Barney; they don't shear lambs." —Funny Folks.

A DOMESTIC TRAGEDY.

(On returning from the theatre, the Thompsons find their housemaid in great distress, with her arm bound up in her apron.)

Mrs. THOMPSON: "What is the matter, Ann, have you hurt your hand?"

ANN: "W-w-worse than that, ma'am!"

Mrs. THOMPSON: "Not broken your arm, I trust?"

ANN: "W-w-worse than that!"

Mrs. THOMPSON: "Good heavens, what is it?"

COOK: "The fact is, ma'am, the silly girl has been tryin' on your new bracelet, and none of us knows how to get it off again!" —Punch.

STANDING NO NONSENSE.

'ARRY: "Phew!"—(the weather was warm, and they had walked over from 'Ammersmith), "bring us a bottle o' champagne, waiter."

WAITER: "Yessir, dry, sir?"

'ARRY (sighing, to put a stop to this familiarity at once): "Never you mind whether we're dry or whether we ain't, bring the wine." —Punch.

THE story of the wag who told a countryman who wanted a drink of water on an express train, to pull the bell-rope and a servant would bring it, has been unearthed and put into circulation again.

"How is your wife, Mr. Smith?" Says Smith, pointing to where his wife sat in the next room at work upon his coat, "She's sew-sew." "Oh I see; she is mending, sure enough."

"Don't be afraid to praise your servants when they deserve it," says Mrs. Swisshelm; but the minute the husband tries that on the girl she has to hunt for another situation.

A COLD RECEPTION.

I THOUGHT it would be delightful when the bright red holly hung

Gaily in cot and palace, and the merry laughter rung,

To visit some rich relations, though the winter's winds blew chill;

Ah, little I thought their welcome might be even colder still!

On reaching their ancient dwelling, surrounded by frost and snow,

I found every face as dismal as the faded mistletoe

That hung in the ancient parlour, and their kiss upon my cheek

Far colder than the winter's blast that made the old gables creak,

And their welcome scarcely spoken was between a groan and squeak.

I thought, oh, how delightful when I get out of this place again!

It may freeze and sleet and hail and snow, it may thunder and may rain;

But the coldness will be cheerful, and the rain will be, oh, bliss!

To the frost of their reception and the coldness of their kiss.

Yet I bore all with the patience of Job in his best of moods,

For lost is the heart that sorrows, or over alights and misfortune broods;

But I thought, my anticipations have met with a sad collapse,

And I wish I was Rip Van Winkle taking my quiet naps,

Out of their sight for twenty years in the warmest of night caps. O. P.

STATISTICS.

THE missing vessel *Atalanta* was built at Pembroke in 1844. She measures 131 feet long by 40 feet beam, and has a displacement of 958 tons. After service as a man-of-war she was used as a police hulk in Portsmouth Harbour until 1877, when the police went into barracks, and upon the foundering of the "Eurydice" she was fitted at Pembroke as a training-ship for young sailors. On the 7th November the "Atalanta" left Portsmouth, with three hundred young seamen on board, for the West Indies, on her third cruise of instruction. On the return journey Captain Stirling, having two cases of yellow fever on board, called at Bermuda on January 29, and left on the 31st for England, since which date nothing has been heard of the vessel or her crew.

HER MAJESTY'S Office of Works has arranged for an annual display of American plants in Hyde Park. Each season the plants will be removed and replaced as frequently as may be found necessary.

HOUSEHOLD TREASURES.

SIPPETS FOR INVALIDS.—Cut a slice of stale bread. Toast it on both sides to a bright brown colour; cut it into small shapes, and lay these side by side on a dish. Pour upon them as much strong beef, mutton, or veal gravy, perfectly freed from fat, as they will absorb. Sprinkle a little salt over and serve. Sippets thus simply prepared are often enjoyed by invalids who cannot partake of fresh meat.

SKATE, FRIED.—Cut the skate into square pieces; let these lie in cold water with a little vinegar or lemon-juice, a sprig of parsley, and a few peppercorns, for an hour; drain, dry, and flour them, dip them in egg and bread-crumbs, and fry them slowly in hot fat till they are brightly browned. Send brown sauce, tomato, piquant, or caper sauce to table with them. Time, eight to ten minutes, according to thickness. If skate is too much done it is spoiled.

SKATE, FRIED, TO EAT COLD.—Put the skate into boiling water, and boil it five minutes; take it up, drain and dry it, and dip in into egg and bread-crumbs. Fry it slowly in hot fat, let it get cold, and serve garnished with parsley. Send mustard, pepper, and vinegar to table with it.

SKATE, TO CLEAN AND PREPARE.—Wash the fish, and rub them over with salt. Rinse them, cut off the tails, and pare the fins all round. Hang them in a cool, airy situation. They will keep three or four days in cool weather.

MISCELLANEOUS.

WE heard asked of one of the "dearest and best" wives, who was conspicuously happy in her domestic relations, how do you manage him? "Ah!" she said, with a merry twinkle in her soft eyes, "the best way to manage a husband is not to manage him."

A YOUNG lady, the daughter of a Liberal M.P., wishes her father to write to Mr. Gladstone for some ideas about spring dresses. She has read in the newspapers that the right honourable gentleman has a wonderful capacity for making figures attractive.

"How came you to fail in your examination?" asked a Cambridge coach of one of his pupils. "I thought I crammed you thoroughly." "Well you see," replied the student, "the fact was you crammed me so tight that I couldn't get it out."

"You see," said a dissipated old Aberdeen bachelor, on being advised to get married—"you see, I can't do it, because I could not marry a woman that I didn't respect, and it would be impossible for me to respect a woman that would consent to marry me."

THE Australian cricket team that are to contest the season with the cricketers of Great Britain are all fine young men, some of them approaching gigantic stature, members of the colonial middle classes, all colonial bred, and they visit England on a pleasure trip, not as professionals. Their first match came off at Southampton on the 13th, 14th and 15th inst. when they played against eighteen players.

CAKE made from the seed of the sunflower is coming into vogue in Sweden, Denmark, and America for feeding cattle upon. It is said to be cheaper and better than linseed for feeding purposes. "Sheep, pigs, pigeons, rabbits, and poultry of all sorts fatten rapidly upon it, and prefer the seed to any other. It increases the quality of eggs from poultry fed upon it."

"I THINK if I were a man," says a lady writer on logic, "and looking out for a wife, I should choose a woman whose appearance at the breakfast table invariably gave as much evidence of care and neatness and of attention which is too often bestowed upon an evening toilet alone." The lady seems not to be aware of the difficulty of men to get to such a breakfast table. Where could they have lodged over night?

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NOTICES TO CORRESPONDENTS.

BOHA.—In the absence of a written agreement we think, on showing a reasonable cause, you could leave at any time.

J. W.—The young man was wrong in not waiting for your explanation, and had he cared for you in the least would not have insulted you. We should advise you to think no more about him.

F. G.—The true cause of our so often having unseasonably cold weather in the first half of May is that when with the return of spring the ice floes in the Arctic Sea begin to float southward, cold currents of air proceed to us. Perhaps this year, owing to a severe winter, the sea has been frozen farther south, so that the melting has begun earlier than usual.

PEARL.—It is impossible to remove freckles, unless they have been caused by exposure to the sun, but you may hide them by dusting them with calamine powder, sold by chemists. If caused by the sun, make a lotion composed of chloride of ammonium, one drachm; spring water, one pint; lavender water, two drachms. Apply with a sponge two or three times a day.

W. W.—We are not acquainted with any such book.

S. X.—If nothing has been paid off the debt within six years the Statute of Limitations will debar recovery.

VIOLET HATE.—Do not be so foolish as to allow your mind to dwell upon "what star you were born under." It is all nonsense.

FRED.—The wages of copyists vary. It depends upon how or where they are employed. They are principally employed by lawyers in making copies and drawing up legal documents.

N. L.—Bathe your face occasionally in a weak solution of borax and water.

ADRIAN.—The proper course to take is to enter on a course of reading in the office of a good lawyer. In the meantime you can make yourself sufficiently useful to him to earn a small salary.

MENTAREL.—The quotation

"Man's inhumanity to man
Makes countless thousands mourn,"

is from Robert Burns' poem, "Man was Made to Mourn."

ANCIENT COIN.—We think that the halfpenny, though dating so far back as John of Gaus's time, would commercially realise little more than its intrinsic value.

AGNES.—Thanks for your complimentary letter. We trust we shall please you as well in the future as in the past.

H. S.—The first named is an American, the other of English birth.

HELEN.—When making a morning call persons meeting at a house are frequently introduced to each other by the hostess in an off-hand manner, for the purpose of facilitating conversation. This is of course understood that the introduction lasts only for that occasion, and persons having thus accidentally met are under no obligation to bow or recognise each other when meeting again.

W. E. G. says: "If a tub is set out in an open field at the commencement of a rainfall, and kept there until the rain ends, will the depth of water in the tub be the depth of water that has fallen on the field? Or, in other words, will it be the average depth of the rainfall? Are there any works showing the difference in the rainfall in different countries? Please give me all the information you can." A Scientific man have written a good deal on this subject. The rainfall in different sections of the globe varies exceedingly—from the rainless deserts of Africa to the excessive humidity of Great Britain. A work published in 1870 gives a full account of the various phenomena of the rainfalls in different parts of the known world up to that time, as far as they were known. The article on rain in any first-class cyclopedia will put you on the track of all there is known on the subject. The water caught in a tub set in a field would not be an accurate gauge of the rainfall on account of the evaporation which would constantly take place. The scientists have invented a rain-gauge in which the water caught flows at once into a receiver where it cannot evaporate or otherwise escape.

LANTHE, ISA, and VIOLET, three friends, would like to correspond with three gentlemen. Lanthé is seventeen, golden hair, blue eyes, medium height. Isa is eighteen, dark, brown hair and eyes, and good-looking. Violet is twenty-one, dark hair, blue eyes, medium height. Respondents must be between twenty and twenty-five, tall, dark, good-looking.

BOOM TOPPING LIFT and FORE GUY, two seamen in the Royal Navy, would like to correspond with two young ladies with a view to matrimony. Boom Topping Lift is twenty-two, medium height, fond of children. Fore Guy is twenty-five, tall, curly hair, fond of music and dancing.

BERTHA and CLARE, two friends, would like to correspond with two gentlemen with a view to matrimony. Bertha is twenty-three, domesticated, medium height, fond of music, dark. Clare is twenty, good-looking, tall, fair, thoroughly domesticated. Respondents must be fond of home, good-looking.

VIOLET and LILY, sisters, would like to correspond with two gentlemen. Violet is seventeen, fond of home. Lily is nineteen, fond of music and dancing. Respondents must be about twenty.

SIMMER DOWN, ONE OF THE FORCERS, and BRAG'S ALLEY RANGER, three seamen in the Royal Navy, would like to correspond with three young ladies with a view to matrimony. Simmer Down is twenty-seven, blue eyes, fair, fond of home. One of the Forcers is twenty-two, fair, blue eyes. Brag's Alley Ranger is twenty-six, dark, of a loving disposition.

AMY and FLORA, two friends, would like to correspond with two tall, dark gentlemen. Amy is eighteen, good-looking, hazel eyes. Flora is seventeen, medium height, good-tempered.

AN OLD MAN'S ADVICE.

It is only an old man's advice,
You may take it or not as you choose,
But those who are anxious to gain
Must also be willing to lose;
And he who is stingy and mean
Can never be expected to find
That others will be unto him
More generous, noble, or kind.

If Love be the good that we crave
Each hour and each moment we learn
The truly affectionate heart
Receives ample wealth in return
So if you would gain a new friend
Your friendliness seek to display,
For the nearest and dearest, you'll find,
Are those you meet more than half way.

If Fortune alone be the prize
You covet its price must be paid,
And often the gain is much less,
Alas! than the sacrifice made.
Yet greedily seeking for wealth
We eagerly press towards the goal,
So bent upon winning the world
We rashly imperil the soul.

Whatever the race that we run,
Whatever the course that we choose,
We must make up our mind at the start
How much we dare venture to lose,
Or else we may happen to find
That what we have sought for with zest
Was really no gain, but a loss
Of all that was dearest and best.

For the wisdom and honours of age
With the freshness of youth we may part,
Nor dream that a crown for the head
Imposes a cross on the heart;
And they who discover too late
They paid an exorbitant price
For all that they gained, may regret
Not taking an old man's advice. J. P.

TINY, PET, POODLE, and PUG, four seamen in the Royal Navy, would like to correspond with four young ladies. Tiny is twenty-one, medium height, dark hair, hazel eyes, fond of children. Pet has light hair, blue eyes, fond of music and dancing. Poodle is dark, fond of children. Pug has auburn hair, blue eyes.

ALFRED, FRED, and ROLAND, three friends, would like to correspond with three young ladies with a view to matrimony. Alfred is twenty-two, medium height, fair, fond of music. Fred is twenty tall, dark, good-looking. Roland is tall, fair, handsome.

CHARLES, a seaman in the Royal Navy, fair, dark eyes, would like to correspond with a good-looking young lady, fond of home.

L. W., twenty-two, medium height, auburn hair, fair, good-looking, a seaman in the Royal Navy, would like to correspond with a young lady with a view to matrimony about nineteen.

A. McC. and L. C., two friends, would like to correspond with two young men. A. McC. is tall, dark hair, grey eyes, fair, good-looking. L. C. is dark, medium height, good-looking. Both are eighteen.

NELLIE and LIZZIE, two friends, would like to correspond with two seamen in the Royal Navy. Nellie is eighteen, medium height, brown hair, blue eyes. Lizzie is twenty, brown hair and eyes, of a loving disposition, domesticated.

CELIA and FANNY, two friends, would like to correspond with two gentlemen in good positions. Celia is nineteen, fond of home, of a loving disposition, fair. Fanny is eighteen, loving, fond of music, auburn hair. Respondents must be about twenty-one, dark, tall, and good-looking.

MILLY, seventeen, dark, black eyes, fond of home, domesticated, would like to correspond with a seaman in the Royal Navy about the same age.

EVA and ALICE, two friends, wish to correspond with two gentlemen. Eva is fair, blue eyes, medium height. Alice is seventeen, tall, dark. Respondents must be tall, good-looking.

CONNY and JOAN, two friends, would like to correspond with two gentlemen with a view to matrimony. Conny is twenty-two, fond of dancing, dark. Joan is twenty, good-tempered, fair, and fond of music and dancing, brown hair.

K. W., nineteen, fair, would like to correspond with a young lady about the same age, fair, light hair, medium height, good-looking.

J. H., dark hair, blue eyes, fond of children, a seaman in the Royal Navy, would like to correspond with a young lady residing in Portsmouth.

BOW CHASER, a seaman in the Royal Navy, would like to correspond with a young lady who is fond of home and music. He is dark, medium height, hazel eyes, good-looking, tall.

RITA and ANNETTE, two friends, would like to correspond with two gentlemen with a view to matrimony. Rita is twenty-five, dark hair, hazel eyes. Annette is eighteen, tall, fair, blue eyes, good-looking. Respondents must be nineteen and twenty-six, dark, good-looking, fond of home.

KATHARINE and LINA, two friends, would like to correspond with two gentlemen with a view to matrimony. Katharine is nineteen, fair, tall, fond of dancing and music. Lina is seventeen, dark, medium height, fond of home and children.

KITTY and ETHEL, cousins, would like to correspond with two tradesmen. Kitty is sixteen, fair, hazel eyes, medium height, fond of music. Ethel is seventeen, blue eyes, fair, fond of home and children.

NELLY and POLLY, two friends, would like to correspond with two young men. Nelly is eighteen, fair, tall, good-looking. Polly is seventeen, medium height, fond of home. Respondents must be tall, dark, fond of music and dancing, good-tempered.

EDWIN and JOE, two friends, wish to correspond with two young ladies. Edwin is fair, of a loving disposition. Joe is dark, loving, handsome.

KNOT IT and CAN'T UNTIE IT, two seamen in the Royal Navy, wish to correspond with two young ladies. Knot It is twenty-one, fair, curly hair, fond of children. Can't Untie It is twenty-four, fair, medium height, fond of children.

GEORGE and ROBERT, two friends, would like to correspond with two young ladies. George is nineteen, and Robert is twenty-one. Respondents must be about the same age, and reside in London.

COMMUNICATIONS RECEIVED:

G. D. is responded to by—Chemist, fair, fond of music, good-looking.

F. O. by—Carlotta, fond of music, dark.

HARRY by—E. K., seventeen.

MOLECULE by—Amy, dark, fond of music, of a loving disposition.

AROM by—Isa, fair, of a loving disposition, fond of music and dancing.

G. D. by—Harry, twenty-one.

F. C. by—Will, twenty.

R. D. by—David T., nineteen, auburn hair, blue eyes, tall, good-looking.

HARRY by—Vivette, seventeen, dark, brown eyes, of a loving disposition.

JOSE by—Annie, eighteen.

VERNON'S RELAY by—Ethel, twenty-two, dark hair, brown eyes, of a loving disposition.

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